

Diplomacy World #109
Spring 2010 - Economic Variants
www.diplomacyworld.net



Notes from the Editor

Welcome to another issue of Diplomacy World. Sometimes it feels like one issue has been out for only a few weeks and the next is upon us. This time, for whatever reason, it seems to be the opposite: to me, it feels like there hasn't been an issue of Diplomacy World in six months. I suppose that's just a consequence of a very hectic real life, for me and the rest of the Diplomacy World staff. Actually, I sometime shave to remind myself that since the rebirth of DW with #97, when I returned as Lead Editor and when Jim Burgess took a more active role again, we have been able to produce some terrific issues on a regular, dependable schedule. I've always felt that above all else, in order to maintain momentum and keep a loyal, interested readership, you have to be able to publish on time. Obviously what you publish is just as important, or moreso, but if you know Diplomacy World is going to be released at the beginning of every quarter – early January, April, July, and October – it makes it that much easier for you to stop by the website and check out the issue. Thanks to all of you who have supported Diplomacy World through the years, but most especially those who have supported us, contributed articles, suggested topics, sent feedback, or simply let other Diplomacy fans that we exist over the last four years. We couldn't do any of this without you...and why would we want to?



I was generally pleased with the response to the Diplomacy World Variant Design Contest. At first I wasn't sure we'd even get a single entry; response to my contests ideas has always been rather low, despite the

prizes. But by the time the deadline rolled around, we actually had more entries than prizes! For me, that's quite a moral victory. The judges are going over the submissions, and next issue the results will be published, along with at least one or two of the entries (all of them will be published in DW eventually, over the next two or three issues). If any of you have ideas for new contests, please let me know. I'm always trying to come up with ways to get more reader participation!

Speaking of participation, we are STILL in need of a new Club and Tournament Editor to replace Jim O'Kelley. This is the editor who focuses on face-to-face play, and tries to keep in touch with the various hobby groups. We've considered splitting the task into multiple editorships, but I believe it is best for one person to hold the position, and they can then try and solicit material from the local hobbies all over the world. If you're interested or have questions, get in touch. Our face-to-face articles continue to be well-written and entertaining, but with all the activity going on we need MORE of them, covering MORE regions. Every major tournament should be able to find a participant to produce an interesting article for the zine. At least that's the way *I* feel about it.

I almost feel like saying we need a new Interview Editor too...what's the deal with Jim Burgess? He needs a good kick in the rear end from from all of you. I can't remember the last time he did an interview for the zine. Actually, part of the problem is coming up with worthwhile interview subjects. So if you've got ideas about that, send them in. The Variant Roundtable he did a few years ago was great fun, maybe there is some other sort of roundtable interview he could organize...a tournament champion roundtable? Let me know what you can come up with!

One great subject would be John Boardman, publisher of Graustark (the first Diplomacy zine ever, if you didn't know). I wouldn't want this issue to go by without mentioning his ill health lately. John had to spend some time in the hospital recently, and our thoughts and prayers go out to him for a quick recovery. Geez, we're all getting older, aren't we? This sucks. Oh well, its part of life. And a reminder of why the hobby always needs new blood...new Diplomacy players...new enthusiasm!

I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for Diplomacy World submissions is July 1st, 2010.

Remember, besides articles (which are always prized and appreciated), we LOVE to get letters, feedback, input, ideas, and suggestions too. So email me at diplomacyworld@yahoo.com! See you in the summer, 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.

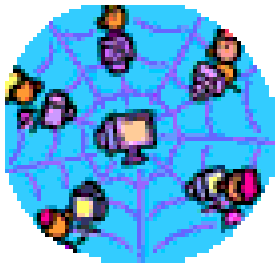
Themes for Upcoming Diplomacy World Issues:



**Diplomacy World #110: Friends and Allies:
Relationships On and Off the Board
Deadline for #110 Submissions – July 1, 2010**



**Diplomacy World #111: Internet Diplomacy
Deadline for #111 Submissions – Oct. 1, 2010**



**Diplomacy World #112: Using Social Networks
in Diplomacy
Deadline for #111 Submissions – Jan. 1, 2011**

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Diplomacy Variants

By Alfred Nicol

To suggest a variant is to somewhat imply that the current offering is perhaps inadequate and lacking in some way or other. In fact one might argue that the numeracy of variants is indicative of some inherent flaw, not sufficient to damn a game altogether, no one produces variants of awful games, they just make new ones, but merely to suggest that whilst the basic premise and even the majority of a game's workings are great, it is, after successive plays, in need of some form of tweaking. If this were true, then one might be inclined to conclude, based on the enormous amount of variants available, that diplomacy is an essentially good yet possibly flawed game. I would like to argue that actually many variants miss a trick about the inherent properties of the game and that the proliferation of variants are in actual fact unnecessary and say little about the great game that Diplomacy is.

Broadly speaking most diplomacy variants fall into two categories. There are those that essentially accept the mechanisms of diplomacy but change the time, location and number of players. Such variants have almost identical rules but the action takes place on a different continent with many new variables that available to the players. There are many such options and various PBEM sites practice them. The other form of variant concentrates on adjusting the actual rules, and whilst often combined with a change of map, the focus is very much on altering the engine of the play. These might include how units move, are built etc. Interestingly these seem to be less prevalent suggesting that most players are actually happier with the playing principles of standard diplomacy than they are with the context.

I would like to argue that either form of variant is unnecessary. In their defense some might claim that they provide variety and a fresh experience which the standard board, after so many plays and so many strategy articles can become rather tired and predictable, and after all why not change the theme or tweak the rules? My response to this would be that firstly diplomacy is not a game with a theme, despite the obvious appearance of recreating the build up to World War One it is in my mind essentially an abstract game. Not so abstract as chess, but abstract nonetheless, so therefore changing the historical or geographical context of the game due to one finding the original setting unsatisfying is perhaps looking for something in the game that was never intended to be there as a point of attraction. So if it is not a historical recreation then what is the game's essential feature? It is of course diplomacy; the interpersonal relationships that determine our strategy. For this reason, in my mind, variants are present in every game, unless you always play with the same friends, as one always sees such different forms of

behavior. The great variant of diplomacy is the psychology, aptitude, experience, honesty and personality of your opponents. It is this where the game holds its own and consequently does not necessarily require an artificial intervention in the form of varying the mechanisms or context. Put simply no two games are the same and furthermore, most strategy articles that focus on openings, especially those that push one opening above any other, are inherently flawed. Yes, Russia may well be Italy's best hope of a long term ally, but if Russia is played by a Muppet then probably not! (I should know, I've argued it, played it, lost it!)



There may however be an additional reason why variants have become popular and that is because people are unwilling to vary their play of a country in order to experiment and create the almost infinite variety that is potentially available in a standard game. The evidence for this lack of variety can be found in statistics describing openings. These indicate that for most countries most opening moves are drawn from a very limited range of options. Essentially the lack of variety comes, which thereby creates the demand for variants, because people don't play in a varied way. There are of course some very good reasons for this. The preponderance of opening strategies can influence players around the world, consider how influential the Lepanto opening has been. In addition the opening strategies exist because they are often based on sound

strategic reasoning, so why would someone play a nation in a way that was detrimental to their chances of success merely to generate variety? This is especially significant when we consider the amount of time and energy playing Diplomacy takes. Face to face games will take most of a day, are difficult to arrange, and for those of us with families, are a rare treat, so we don't want to take an early bath and spoil our experience just for the sake of experimentation and we end up playing safe. The same is equally true of PBEM games which may take six months to complete. Consequently the game can degenerate into a fairly predictable and formulaic experience that convinces players that it is time for a change and time for a variant. We can cure this monotony by quite simply varying our playing style. That is why I especially liked the recent article encouraging England to ignore Norway. Italy needn't go for Tunis, and I have recently read of a Turkish opening considering a Smyrna-Syria. One day I shall try a Liverpool-Clyde, with minimal impact strategically there are few less harmful ways of declaring to the whole board your abject incompetence thus giving interesting political leverage and unsuspected powers in the first two to three years.

It would be an interesting competition to encourage not Diplomacy variants, but rather variants of playing Diplomacy: Who can come up with the most outlandish openings, alliances and strategies which whilst being unorthodox are still strategically credible? By playing unconventionally the desire for variants may well evaporate and the true character of the game will shine not its theme or the necessary limitations of the unchanged board, but the diplomacy.

However the preponderance of variants need not reflect badly on either the game or the players. It is a testimony to the game's capacity to inspire, that it has generated so much discussion, writing and variants; far more than even the most popular fare as displayed on websites like board game geek. And whilst I am engaging in some blatant inconsistency I would like to finish with a few suggestions of possible minor adjustments, rather than variants, to the standard game. (They are not competition entries and nor are they very original)

1. **Italy should get a second fleet.** *This will give them more influence in the Mediterranean and increase their capacity to get two centers. Frequently Italy, unless they pile into AH, are stuck on four centers for several years.*
2. **Expand Piedmont and Tuscany into one region.** *This gives Italy the chance to offer a supported attack on Marseilles should they wish and make it less easy for France to guarantee two builds in the fall of 01.*
3. **Make a land bridge across the strait of Gibraltar between Spain and North Africa.**

This would work in the same way that one exists between Denmark and Sweden. This would be of ambiguous benefit to both nations but wouldn't alter the stalemate line.

4. **Allow a round of negotiation in winter 1899.** *After which all players declare their first three builds of any combination of fleets and armies so long as they are legal placements, i.e. on supply centers. This will allow for real variation of strategy especially between adjacent nations separated by water Consider the options of France and England not having fleets in Brest and London, or Russia and Turkey negotiating a fleetless Black Sea. It will also allow for a stab before the game has even begun.*
5. (This one is weird.) **Give Moscow a coast into the Caspian Sea.** *(There was an article rejecting this possibility by none other than the great Calhoun himself.) At first sight an opportunity to build in a land locked sea so the fleet will never be able to leave, and a sea no one else may ever enter, seems very strange. However I think it would be an important option and redress a possible imbalance in the game. The sea would be adjacent to Sevastopol and Armenia and thus would have significant strategic opportunities for Russia. They could convoy an army from Moscow to Armenia with support from Sevastopol, and could cut any support offered by Armenia (which would need a west and east coast) for a hostile Black Sea fleet into Sevastopol. The reason for giving Turkey such a hard time with this amendment, especially when one considers their low win statistics, is their superbly high percentage of draws. Once up to five or six centers, it is very unlikely they will ever be eliminated and thus they have the best chance of a draw mainly due to their corner position, rather than any strategic acumen of the player. The addition of this Achilles heel will also undermine Turkey's security of merely accepting a juggernaut alliance. This may seem very anti-Turkey but actually this vulnerability will mean Turkey is more likely to stab the "bear" knowing that if he doesn't the board is no longer his friend. Russia in the meantime has to balance the clear tactical advantages of such a move against the significant, but limited strategic value of a trapped fleet with little use once Turkey is dead.*

However perhaps the best variant of all, from my perspective, would be to stop being eliminated! Such is life...

Alfred is an occasional, and welcome, contributor to Diplomacy World. One of those names that I am always glad to see in my Diplomacy World inbox!

“Modernizing” Diplomacy

Lewis Pulsipher

As some of you know, "back when" (the 70s) I designed a great many published Diplomacy variants, but gave that up to design commercial boardgames in the late 70s/early 80s. See the entry:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia_%28board_game%29

After a 20 year hiatus, about five years ago I started to design board and card games once more.

One of my many projects is to design a version of a classic game "as though it was designed today", in light of the popularity of Euro-style boardgames. (Let me hasten to say that I am not a fan of Euro games, but there are characteristics of these games that match the preferences of younger people as well as many older ones.) There is a Euro-ized version of *Britannia*, not marketable where the subject is the same as *Britannia*, but I will be marketing versions that show other histories. There's a Euro-ized version of *Risk* (but very different, more filling the niche of *Risk* while fixing its many faults). There's even re-made *Monopoly* and *Stratego* (kind of). Someday I'll figure out a Euro-ized version of *Axis & Allies*.

What's relevant here is "modernized *Diplomacy*". I want to try to make two (or more) games that are "*Diplomacy* if it were designed today". Understand I'm not suggesting this can be better than existing *Diplomacy*; I'm just interested in a game that has an essence of *Diplomacy* but is crafted for modern tastes. Modern gaming tastes, especially as reflected in Euro games (which originated as family games on steroids), are quite different from the Cold War tastes of 1959 (or 69 or even 79). (See my article "The Essence of Euro-style Games," at:

<http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/Essence.shtml>

For example, I have doubts about designing a game that requires a player to write orders every turn. *Game of Thrones: the Boardgame*, which could be characterized as an extreme variant of *Diplomacy*, uses a chit system so that no one needs to write orders (and order execution is no longer simultaneous). Further, games in which players are eliminated are frowned upon. For that matter, many people won't play *Diplomacy* because it results in too many hard feelings and even ruined friendships. Can we make a game where negotiation is important, but where the knife-edge is much less emphasized?

In other words, I'm not aiming at the Diplomacy-player market, although I'd like to make a game that most *Diplomacy* players can enjoy.

One characteristic of Euro games is to eliminate cut-throat competition, sometimes to almost entirely eliminate any competition. This can only be incorporated in a limited way and still maintain any resemblance to *Diplomacy*.

Some people think the essence of *Diplomacy* is backstabbing. (Such folks presumably never play the no-negotiation ("gunboat"?) versions of Dip.) For some that may be true, though not for me. When I played postal *Diplomacy* long ago, I found the best way to minimax the game, for me, was to never lie (seriously, I am not kidding). People came to understand that whatever Lew told them was true, though he didn't volunteer all of his future plans. This required a very long-term view of the strategy of the game as a whole, and often involved alliances of limited duration (either in time or in result) so that people could "go for it" toward the end of the game. It also resulted in many 2 and 3 way draws, which was fine with me. The "solo" win in *Diplomacy* has absolutely nothing to do with history, and as I have a Ph.D. in military and diplomatic history, you can see why draws might not bother me a bit. So to me, grand strategy was the essence of *Diplomacy*, and a modernized Dip could concentrate on that rather than on backstabbing.

There are many different ways to go with this. Clearly, if I design a game that takes the nasty edge out of *Diplomacy* (though still allows lying and changing sides to help you succeed), the hard-core-nasty *Diplomacy* players won't be interested. But at the same time, a much larger group may become interested (or become interested again, as I know 'way too many people who stopped playing *Diplomacy* when it became too personal).

Holistic Approach

One way to go with "modern Diplomacy" is to make it one level above abstract, by removing the tactical component. It could be a fairly short and simple game, though I'm not sure it could be properly balanced without entirely removing any resemblance of World War I.

I confess, I've tried to represent a constrained diplomatic situation in an introductory wargame, one that uses cards but no board for maneuver. For example, if you play a "diplomacy" card you can stop a war (at least, temporarily). The system was used, in part, in a boardgame prototype I worked on several years ago (now "lying fallow") about colonization in the ancient world. I've even designed a pretty abstract card wargame based around this system that involves negotiations and a formal alliance structure, but I'm not yet sure there's anything in it, nor would I say it would put people in mind of *Diplomacy*.

Perhaps a more detailed card game that reflected World War I could work.

Another way to approach the game is to make the new game more realistic. In other words, represent World War I in something much closer to reality than the abstraction that is *Diplomacy*. I have already designed and started to test such a game ("*1914, the Lights Go Out*"), for five players but with options for two to eight. The trick here is to avoid a very long game or one that feels too much like the stalemate that characterized much of World War I. Consequently I have thrown out the "power of the trenches", and use a point system to determine victory. The game also includes control of (sometimes) active neutral powers, which is what lets it work for 2-8 players. It uses "committed intent" cards as a replacement for simultaneous movement. But it is too complex for present purposes (rules currently over 6,000 words). I want something simple, in some ways simpler than *Diplomacy*.

What's the essence, and what's "wrong" with *Diplomacy* as a "modern" game?

These are "holistic" ways to approach the problem. Another way is to list the "essence of *Diplomacy*" and go from there:

- Negotiation (and we could stop there)
- Lies, damn lies, and diplomacy (with a lower-case d)
- World War I (distantly)
- the support mechanism
- simultaneous movement (the two fundamental mechanisms of the game)

In the absence of overt chance elements, it is the simultaneous movement that provides mechanical uncertainty in *Diplomacy*. The major source of uncertainty is, of course, the intentions of the other players. My prototype colonization boardgame used the support mechanism, but not simultaneous movement.

Maybe we can list problems with the game as a "modern" game:

- It's much too long. A time limit and points should be adequate.
- It engenders serious hard feelings (not surprising in a game that encourages cheating)
- It's TERRIBLY unhistorical, not just a little bit.
- Writing down orders is really old-fashioned. Can we really have people writing simultaneous orders? Only if everything else is very simple. A near-simultaneous method is much preferable.
- Adjudication of moves can be a little complex for

typical gamers. In other words, the tactics are too complex for a broader audience.

- Too many opportunities to negotiate contributes to length--15 minutes is much too long, unless there are few turns.
- Neutrals are completely unrepresented except as booty. Yet much of the real "great game" was influencing neutrals.
- Requires too many players
- It was too damn long even for the 60s and 70s, let alone in the short-attention span of today. (Yes, I mentioned too long twice.)

The game is abstract--there is little differentiation of nations, the Turks were not in the same league as the others (some would say the Italians too), the Turkish fleet can be as large as the English fleet. But most modern Euro-style games are quite abstract, so I don't list this as "wrong".

The "Real" Essence?

Now consider an "essence" of *Diplomacy* that is even higher-level than "backstabbing" or "grand strategy". *Diplomacy* is a game of playing the other players, with strategic and tactical components. The strategic component is more or less necessary; the tactical component exists to avoid a wholly abstract game, and also exists to provide additional grist for negotiation, and to provide interest to those who are more tactically minded (and who probably like "Gunboat" style). Yet when you come down to it, if two players agree to gang up on one, and other players don't intervene, tactics don't matter: the lone player is dead. In fact, the extreme of a negotiation game would involve players choosing certain states of conflict or non-conflict with "nearby" other powers, followed by a resolution, followed by further choosing. At this extreme the game becomes very abstract, and I'm not at all sure whether people would like it.

It would be desirable for a modernized *Diplomacy* to be playable by email, as well.

Whatever the game, I think five players is the ideal. But the "modern" way would be to design a game that easily accommodates many different numbers of players, not just a particular number.

I have been thinking about these projects for years, and have one "more realistic" prototype on the go as I described, but I hope to do more.

If you're interested in contributing in any way to these projects, contact Lew at [lew \[you know what to put here\] pulsipher.net](mailto:lew@pulsipher.net), or contact him through Facebook. His Web site is pulsiphergames.com.

Total Diplomacy: The Art of Winning Risk

by Ehsan Honary

A Book Review by Zachary Jarvie

This last Christmas I received a gift card from for amazon.com from my parents. I must say I was sorely tempted to purchase a copy of the 50th anniversary edition of Diplomacy. However like many players who discovered the game on-line I have no friends I can think of who would want to play the game with me face to face so I decided that if I wanted to scratch my Diplomacy itch I should get a book to help me better my amateurish abilities at the game.

Why would a Diplomacy player care to read a book about the game of RISK? Well for one there are not very many books about Diplomacy. The texts of the classic book by Richard Sharp and the articles by the inventor Allan B. Calhamer and many others are all available for free on the internet. And I must say I fell victim to the thing we are all told not to do in regard to books. I "judged it by its cover". The title of Honary's book says it all: "Total Diplomacy". Well I must say that I was not disappointed. Over two thirds of the >300 page book is dedicated to just that, diplomacy and other concepts of player relations and manipulations that are directly applicable to the game of Diplomacy. Alliances, treaties, deception, debate, in game politics, and propaganda are just a few of the topics Honary discusses. He spends a good deal of the book examining how to influence others and when possible control the decisions of other players. Naturally he also covers how to identify and resist attempts to be controlled yourself.



Of course he does dedicate nearly a third of the book to the strategy and tactics of the game of RISK. Most of which is not in any way applicable to the game of Diplomacy simply because at the mechanical level RISK works very differently than Diplomacy. The discussions of Turtling, Turtle Killing and other RISK strategies and tactics made interesting reading and those still playing RISK will benefit from them.

But if you just play Diplomacy and not RISK this stuff will all be fairly "academic" and as such I won't discuss it further in this review.

One of the interesting things Mr. Honary does is propose a classification system for identifying player personalities and how to go about playing against such characters. While lessons can be learned from his player classification scheme, it is designed for RISK, so some extrapolation is necessary to apply the scheme to Diplomacy players. His groups are . . .

The Aggressive/Expansionist: Honary describes this kind of player as having " . . . a huge tendency to invade at the drop of a hat." His invasion is more often than not planned in advance and "he does not hesitate to attack if he has the opportunity." According to Honary one of this player's weaknesses is that, "He can get himself into trouble by not thinking about all the aspects of a move. He may just invade for the sake of it."

While both games require a player to be aggressive at some point in order to win, in both games players can suffer from poorly aimed aggression. His description of this type of RISK personality has some parallels in Diplomacy. Many players set out to lull a single opponent into a sense of security before launching a concerted and devastating offensive in the first 2-3 years of the game. Such strategies can have a big pay off but such actions can upset the balance of power in a number of ways. Hastily perusing a short-term gain can in the long run benefit your other opponents more than you.

Honary suggest that aggressive players have to be dealt with by force as they are unlikely to be otherwise cooperative. Honary suggest that aggressive players are "not usually interested in alliances and treaties, but equally he might not be politically active either." It may be true that an aggressive player in RISK lacks interest in alliances but I think it is an absolutely false assertion in Diplomacy. Early in the game an aggressive Diplomacy player wants one or two safe borders so he can throw everything he has at his intended target. I see the aggressive Diplomacy player as being very alliance focused. Setting up one strong alliance early on and sticking with it . . . at least until the allies centers become too irresistible. An aggressive player may have set up one or more patsy alliances in order to prepare for an invasion but I think he is very likely to stab these "allies" very soon in the game. Other than that I think I agree with the assertion that aggressive players are politically inactive.

Honary advises that very aggressive players need to be dealt with early in the game. If you can, direct his aggression to benefit you. Otherwise form a coalition to defeat him. "Since he is an expansionist, he might have attacked more than one player. As a Result quite a few players may have incentives to join in... Since he is not usually politically active, he is doomed."

The Conservative/Isolationist: "A conservative player tends to perform his moves in a subtle way. He believes that by staying out of action, he will survive longer and have a higher probability of Winning. He likes to build up slowly."

My initial impression is that of his four player classes, this one may be hardest to apply to Diplomacy players. The chief characteristic of this kind of RISK player is that he does his best to stay put and ruffle no feathers. In RISK the most extreme manifestation of this strategy is called Turtling. A Turtle consolidates a group of territories into a single holding, make no further aggressive movements and slowly grows his forces while His opponents duke it out.¹ In Diplomacy you must acquire new SC's to grow your forces so you can only stay put for so long. Staying put in Diplomacy means you maintain your stealth growing neither stronger nor weaker. You wait and see how other players develop. They may become weak but they may also grow very strong and each failure to gain a new supply center could paint another stripe on the target on your back.

As a long term strategy it seems to me that being an Isolationist is a dead end in Diplomacy. However as a short term strategy being conservative can be wise. It is a commonly held opinion that any country that gets 3 builds at the end of 1901 is just asking to have all his neighbors drop all else and move to put him and his 6-7 units down. A conservative player in Diplomacy can grow slowly and become a true power house. But an isolationist boxes himself in. In both games Conservative/Isolationist players are interested in negotiations particularly those that increase their own safety. Honary makes an excellent point on a weakness this type of player has in RISK and may have in Diplomacy "... in negotiations one has to give something in return for something else. A conservative

¹ According to Honary, Turtling is a very contentious tactic in the RISK community. While some are proponents of it, others despise it because the first player to attack the turtle does so at his peril and everyone knows it. This allows the turtle to thrive unmolested and so it becomes a very successful strategy. But if everyone engages in Turtling the game grinds to a halt with each player taking minimal offensive actions for the sake of cards. Honary suggest that Turtling can be useful if you have been severally damaged and you need to repair your position. He also advises that when a Turtle becomes apparent, players should work together to remove a turtle by each committing a prearranged number of troops to the cause.

player may find it difficult to offer something as he only usually has his fortress."

The Dealmaker/Negotiator: Wait a minute! Aren't all Diplomacy players supposed to fall into this group! Is Honary suggesting some RISK players don't? The sad truth may be that there are players in both RISK and Diplomacy who under engage in negotiation.

This is how Honary describes the Dealmaker/negotiator, "A negotiator is always interested in solving problems without using force. He can be tough to play against, especially if he is experienced." It is not surprising that this type of player is the one Honary gives the highest esteem to. The Dealmaker/negotiator is the type of player that embodies much of what the author is trying to impart in the book!

Still, Honary does give some advice as to how to beat him. "In Risk [and in Diplomacy!], a deal is only a verbal contract, which can always be broken. This is the biggest weakness of a negotiator, which can be devastating for someone who has counted on [deals] so much". You see Honary's dealmaker, in the game of RISK, "usually believes that those who have more deals have a better chance at succeeding in the game.", he "usually comes knocking on your door with a deal." ... and believes that "A deal is always better than no deal".

As I have said, all Diplomacy players are supposed to be negotiators, so how can we be exclusive enough to apply Honary's Dealmaker/Negotiator class as a category of Diplomacy players rather than a description of all of them? I think the answer comes in Honary's first sentence regarding this class of player, "A negotiator is always interested in solving problems without using force." It should be restated that a negotiator is always interested in solving problems without using HIS forces! What Honary really is describing is the manipulator, the player who uses any means to get others to do his dirty work for him. Propaganda, alliances, misinformation, favors, guilt trips, and of course deals are his weapons. To him, guns are for armatures. In Diplomacy a master manipulator is difficult to fight as it's usually his puppets doing the fighting and you may not even know who it is that's pulling the strings!

Honary suggest two paths for dealing with this type of player.

1. "... make a deal with him and follow through . . . " the idea is to meet and fight him in the end of the game after all opposition is gone.
2. "... make a deal with him and stab him in the back . . ."

I think it is interesting that both options involve making a deal with him. I suppose that if you don't make a deal with a dealmaker someone else will. If you don't play

along with a manipulator he may then turn around and start manipulating others into attacking you. As Diplomacy players we might say that it's better to try to best the dealmaker or manipulator at his own game then to reject or ignore him because he will just send his puppets to cut you up if he doesn't think he can otherwise use you.

The Strategyless/Amateur: The advice given for dealing with this type of player probably crosses over to Diplomacy more seamlessly than for any of the other three. But then again, how many articles or internet discussions have you read about pretending to be an armature in order to lull other players into a false sense of security?

Honary describes this type of player as such "An amateur is a new player to the game who does not have much experience. This category also covers those who are not sure what they want and just go with the flow, expecting a miracle."

It's the amateurs unpredictability that poses the biggest risk to any game, Diplomacy or Risk. He can get lucky with his moves and become a large threat. But (I suspect) more often than not his moves can be poorly planned and not only result in disaster for him but also severely unbalance the game as he brings undeserved victory or destruction to his neighbors.

Honary's advice in dealing with an amateur is much the same as I have heard from other Diplomacy players. He advises that you first see if you can use him. If you can't use him or he proves unreliable you should do everything you can to kill him as fast as possible.

Admittedly having only 4 groupings of players seems a little restrictive of Mr. Honary. Surely not all players of RISK (let alone Diplomacy) fit into his clean categories. But I suppose you can subdivide and subdivide until you get a category for each individual on the planet. I think it is best to apply Honary's categories to players as they are in the moment. The 1902 Dealmaker/Negotiator may turn into the 1904 Aggressive/Expansionist or the 1903 Conservative/Isolationist may turn into the 1905 Strategyless/Amateur, etc. Players and their tactics can develop even in the course of a single game. One strategy can be a prelude to another. Plans can also fall apart and a lack of flexibility can leave a player vulnerable. It may be that the goal of a good player is to play the role that the others in the game are least able to best at that moment.

I have spent the bulk of this book review talking about a relatively small section of Honary's actual book. There is much more that is worth reading but it simply can't and shouldn't be covered in full detail. Those truly interested should buy the book. But I have a few more quick things to add. I found his examination of what can be learned

from the "Prisoner's Dilemma" to be particularly interesting. To boil his advice down he argues that if you are likely to never again play with an opponent then betraying him before he betrays you will have the best payoff. But if you expect to play several games against an opponent then a more long range goal involving the establishment of trust is recommended. In such situations he proposes steps for optimizing future results that I won't go into here. I also enjoyed his chapters involving deceiving and compelling desired actions in other people. His examples are intended as instruction on not just how to deceive others but also how to detect deception directed at you. Despite his long discourse on how to use deception he states the following regarding trust. "If you need to gain peoples' trust, do not lie to them." p.219. , that seems straightforward enough.



I'm not sure if reading Dr. Honary's book has made me a better Diplomacy player. I don't think anything could really help me in that regard. However it has given me a lot to think about and has introduced some new ideas to me that I had not previously considered. At the very least I feel it has been very informative to read about engaging in diplomacy in the context of a game rather than having to extrapolate information and lessons from books about more serious topics such as real war and real international or business relations. This book provides such information pre-distilled and while the book is intended for the game of RISK it is certainly digestible for the Diplomacy player as well.

TempleCon 2010

By Alex Maslow

Before: It is February 1st, and in less than one week before TempleCon. I've never been to a convention of any sort whatsoever. The closest I've ever done was the Star Wars exhibit at Boston's museum of Science while in college and the Star Wars concert this previous November. I've always been something of a closet geek, and never really enjoyed being surrounded with my own kind. I'm not ashamed of my geekdom, I just like to keep it stored away most of the time. I'm the dork of my friends, but we were all dorks once. I just refused to stop being one. As a result, I've stopped being comfortable around dorks. I tried to get into a Dungeons and Dragons game last year at a hobby shop, and left 1 hour later out of pure fright. They seemed to forget this was a game of dice, and cursed a variety of ancient gods quite rudely on a consistent basis. I suppose I ought to really call myself a professional dork. I am a professional in the real world, who also harbors a love for Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, and board games.

My introduction to TempleCon was simple enough; I came across it online while looking for a local convention. I went to the site and learned I'd missed the pre-registration deadline by..... 2 hours. So I e-mailed the woman in charge and made several ridiculous jokes about my fate and ignorance, and she was gracious enough to let me pre-register (which was extraordinarily cheaper). I then went about trying to find anyone who was also going to TempleCon. I came out with the awesome number of zero. Oh well! Sometimes new experiences are best done alone. I hope.



According to the TempleCon website, it's a pretty huge convention that began 5 years ago. They claim to still be learning, but then they said they had a "new" technology called a "map," and they hoped this would help people find where their games are. My expectations crashed and burned, but were not completely wiped out. I suppose I'd been treating conventions like conspiracy theorists treat the government: as an all-powerful force impervious to mistakes. In both cases...wrong.

I am also a simpleton, in that I get overwhelmed easily. I am not agoraphobic (I am actually an inspirational public speaker and tour guide), but I hate being in a huge crowd of strangers in a place I know nothing about. That some of the people might be dressed like the jokers in the photo will not help. I may bring my Gandalf Costume just to blend in until I find the Diplomacy tables. If it were up to me, I would go to a convention that was ONLY Diplomacy. But this is not the hand dealt to me, so I must weave through the ridiculous traffic of costume geeks, probably getting the bejeezus scared out of me in the process. So I was dismayed when I read this:

"In 2009 we fired a flare and tried out introducing a few live shows including belly dancers and live burlesque entertainment to a gaming convention. Surprisingly, people liked this. So we're bringing more of this to TempleCon 2010, this time in a dedicated performance space."

Hopefully this will be on the map, and I can steer clear of it as I struggle to locate the Diplomacy room. Diplomacy? Oh, right, that's why I'm going there in the first place!

Among my friends, I am the expert. I have been playing since I was 11, which means I've been playing half my life. I used to spend my free time reading and critiquing all the articles online, until I finally read them all, upon which time I decided to start to write my own. I play and negotiate hard, and usually do well if I can avoid the initial "band together and kill Maslow" sentiment among my "buddies". But I'm not sure how well I will do in the "big leagues." I have no qualms about bragging about my tactical genius (I play enough war games to know I have the rather straightforward tactical set-up of Diplomacy down) but my negotiation style sometimes leaves something to be desired. I am not very good at playing the fool, and so usually get knocked down because I can't pretend I don't know exactly what I'm doing. I tend to come off fairly arrogant.

But I don't really play Dip to win, and I'm certainly not driving 2 hours to beat a bunch of strangers. I play Dip to have fun and enjoy myself – I love the challenge that every new game is unique. I hope to use the convention as an opportunity to meet people and make some friends and have a good time. And if I win, all the better! But I'm not going to kick and fuss.

Feb 4th: TempleCon is tomorrow and I'm worried I've made several mistakes. First, signing up at all. Second, working that morning (it will be the longest 3 hour shift ever). Third, I completely forgot to book a hotel room – I might be sleeping in my car. Fourth, I don't know

ANYONE who is going. I even tried e-mailing the person in charge of the Diplomacy and haven't heard back. Fifth, on the event program, the Diplomacy is referred to NADF Grand Prix Tournament, which makes me think I needed to sign up separately for that and my 30 bucks for my convention badge will do nothing more than let me observe. But it doesn't seem logical for some high class tournament to operate within a convention, much less a convention in Rhode Island. I think it's just some fancy phrasing of "We're going to score your games and record them for posterity," which is a fancy way of saying "this game counts." In addition to all this, I need to work Sunday morning, which means I'll need to leave the tournament early. I knew this going into it (and I need to save my days off for family birthdays), but it only just hit me how much of a bummer that is going to be.

Feb 5th: I had a nightmare about TempleCon. I remember nothing, but am now quite terrified of going. I think there was a sword swallower in my dream...

Also, I FINALLY got an e-mail back from the guy running the Diplomacy. Apparently this being a tournament is irrelevant, in that I'll still be able to play, which is a relief. He also said they might have rooms for me to stay in. So, yahoo on those fronts! Now time to pack up, go to work, and head off to RI! Oo, can't forget my camera!

Feb 7th: Well, I'm back, and I had a blast! Everyone couldn't be nicer (except for those stabs, of course), the hotel couldn't have been more accommodating, and the whole experience wasn't the sensory overload I expected. I showed up at 4 – the first round was at 6. The whole convention was relegated to about 4 or 5 rooms, which was far less than I expected. I suppose the old venue was quite small and that this is a BIG upgrade for them, and I shouldn't judge them by the relative smallness. There were definitely a couple hundred people, mostly playing Warhammer.

The Con started well enough for me. I got bored of wandering at 5 PM and decided to play a demo game of Warmachine, which is (from what I saw) a faster version of Warhammer (a miniatures game, if you didn't know). I actually whooped the other guy's butt, but the game took much longer than I had thought and had to quit when I realized it was nearly 6. I dashed to the Diplomacy room and met the other players who I hadn't already seen.

The first game was nearly a disaster for me: both in-game and out of the game. I was Germany next to an excellent Melissa Call as France. I decided a personal goal in the game was to stab Melissa. This got tossed aside by a tight EF alliance against me, which got tossed by the wayside by a runaway Italy. I played nearly the entire game with only two depots, but held an important position in the stalemate line, and so survived to take part in the 5 way draw. However, the game wasn't my only struggle. The deadlines were drop dead, and turns began immediately after each other, 17 min for Spring,

15 min for Fall. The extra 2 minutes was for builds. Reading orders and moving pieces and resolving conflicts also ate into this time. Being used to online Dip, this sort of deadline ran me pretty hard, and I misordered once because of it (although that game, nearly everyone misordered at least once). Also, when Melissa called for a grand alliance against Italy in '04, I was in no position to do much of anything but support my own position. The game was somewhat a bore.

The next game the following day I was Russia and got completely wrecked by an English and Turkish team. I ended up with one unit in Vienna in '08 before finally being eliminated. The game ended in a draw.

I spent the next several hours collecting myself and figuring out what was going wrong. I finally grabbed a gentleman named Christian who was in both of my games and asked him for some advice. He said I was doing well, I just kept getting surrounded by enemies for whom talking to me wasn't very beneficial, but that I wasn't exactly to blame for my losses. At the very least, he reminded me it was my first tournament and I shouldn't get too discouraged or worked up over losing my first few games.

The last game was an interesting game that lasted until about 3 in the morning (started at 7 PM with 1 hour break for dinner). We didn't have enough players so we the Tournament Director grabbed some kids who had been watching us and asked if they wanted to play. So there were 3 Dip players and these 4 other guys. I was Turkey and one of the other guys was Austria, and quickly sought to take advantage of him. But apparently they knew Diplomacy quite well, and we battled incessantly, occasionally banding together to hit Russia. I have no idea what happened on the other side of the board, and while I recall the game ending in a draw, I don't remember what happened beyond the Vienna/Bohemia/Silesia border. I got stabbed right at the end, but agreed to the draw because, well, it was 3 in the morning. And even if I could have gotten revenge, it wouldn't have mattered much; Whoever had the most depots wasn't in our corner (I think it was Germany).

March 17: Well, I just remembered I had written this and read it over. Exactly how I remember it – I was incredibly excited, then incredibly anxious, then outright afraid, then drove on a high of anticipation, and breathed the greatest sigh of relief upon arrival. And the tournament was a blast, even if I got pounded. The people were fun and the games were exciting. And I even met some of those pirates. Apparently they do benefit shows for sick children. So everything worked out! I hope next year I do better, but if I don't, I hope I have as much fun.

You can see the complete TempleCon results in The Abyssinian Prince #322:
<http://devel.diplom.org/DipPouch/Postal/Zines/TAP/TAP322.pdf>

Is Imperial an Economic Diplomacy Variant?

By Richard Hannon

Imperial is a board game designed by Mac Gerdts and published in 2006. Published in the US by Rio Grande Games, it first caught my eye on a shelf in our local game store. The back of the box showed a map that looked incredibly similar to Diplomacy's—World War I Europe. The difference is that Imperial featured factories in addition to armies and fleets, as well as money. "Cool!" I said to my friend. "Diplomacy with money! And look—it plays with fewer than 7 players!" Lo and behold, on my birthday that same friend had generously (selfishly?) procured that title for my gift.



Many similarities with Diplomacy were apparent. There is a luck-free combat system. There is the map – World War I Europe. There are the Great Powers – all of Diplomacy's save Turkey, which has been relegated to a neutral in Imperial. After a few plays, other similarities crept in to perspective. Austria is still almost always smashed between her neighbors. France and England can never get along. Italy, however, enjoyed a

renaissance in the Mediterranean with Turkey's competition removed.

The differences, however, far outstrip the likenesses. Diplomacy features simultaneous movement while Imperial has traditional turn order. Diplomacy's movement conventions are followed, but only as one of several options. Each power does not necessarily order its units on a turn, but may buy reinforcements, build a factory or benefit the investing players. That's right; investing players, plural. Each Power in Imperial can have more than one player investing money in its coffers and therefore having a stake in its outcomes. This is done by purchasing bonds which give the Power capital to operate but which also pay out interest to the purchasing player. Add your bond interest multiplied by the country's power rating to your cash in hand at the end of the game, compare the amounts among the players and see who wins. Whereas Diplomacy requires the holding of a certain amount of territory to win, Imperial can be won by controlling no countries and occupying no territories, but rather by investing wisely.

So is Imperial an economic Diplomacy variant? I don't think so. It is an entirely different game system. It focuses on stock trading elements which are attached to military success, while Diplomacy focuses on military success via negotiations. Both are fun; they are just unrelated. If you wanted an Imperial-style economic Diplomacy variant, you could take the factories from Imperial and allow money to be distributed for control of supply centers. Assign a cost for units or factories, and allow factories to provide a bonus of extra cash income, just as a supply center would. For example, each supply center earns \$1. Each unit costs \$1 of upkeep per build phase and \$1 to purchase. Each factory costs \$3, but earns an extra \$1 per build phase with no upkeep. This allows players to choose between growing their economic base and their military arm while staying true to the fundamentals of Diplomacy. This is what we were looking for in Imperial and didn't find. We did find a well-done, creative game that is well worth checking out. So in between your Diplomacy sessions give Imperial a whirl and see if you like it. You just may.

I was very pleased to see Richard return for a second issue. Whether or not S&T Editor Joshua Danker-Dake's constant threats to him were a contributing factor, I don't know...and don't want to know. Whatever it takes to keep him coming back!

German Naval Power

By Joshua Danker-Dake

Kaiser Wilhelm II (he of the eye-gouging mustache), the grandson of Queen Victoria, was a great admirer of Great Britain's Royal Navy, and rather embarrassed by the state of the Kaiserliche Marine he'd inherited. Just before the turn of the century, he named Alfred von Tirpitz (he of the eye-gouging beard) head of the German Navy, and implemented the Tirpitz Plan, the goal of which was to build a navy to rival Britain's. Following this, the Kaiser passed five separate Naval Laws, each further increasing the size of the German fleet. Wilhelm's goals were to expand Germany's global influence and to make Germany a more attractive ally – and to ensure Germany “a place in the sun.” But Great Britain, naturally, felt severely threatened, and expanded its own fleet. An arms race ensued, culminating in the First World War.

Now to Diplomacy. Apart from England, is there any country for whom continual naval well-being is more important than it is for Germany? France? Barring German intervention, France can keep England at bay without committing to a massive navy. Russia? Russia can do a lot of damage with fleets, but he can produce them only slowly, and most Russias can get by without a strong navy for much of the game. Italy? Italy needs a lot of fleets, but he needs a lot of armies just as badly if not worse; anyway, the world has yet to fear the power of the Italian navy.

When Germany loses, it is usually one of the northern countries – France, England, or Russia – who comes tramping through the *Deutsches Reich*. Fleets are necessary for fending off each of these countries. Rarely is Austria, Turkey, or Italy (unless Italy is trying to get cute from the beginning of the game) the first to capture a German home center.

The North Sea is Germany's back door, much like the English Channel is England's – but a lot more countries have access to the North Sea. And unlike Austria, the other country who begins the game *surrounded* by enemies, Germany can't devote himself exclusively to the ground game. Look at a Diplomacy map. Granted that Germany takes Denmark in the first year (Holland too, if you want), look how much coast Germany controls. Look how many sea territories border him. Germany cannot scrape by with a discount navy.

Yet in spite of all this shared water and naval rivalry, Germany is a better ally for England than France is. France threatens the English Channel, England's very vulnerable back door. An alliance with Germany allows England to try to establish himself on the western edge of the board; a French alliance easily gets England overextended into the middle of the continent.

The reverse tends to be true as well. England is, for the most part, a better ally for Germany than France is. Germany's biggest problem in the mid- and end-game is that he gets pinched between France or England and Russia or one of the other southern powers. But that pinch is less painful with England, both because it's easier to set boundaries and because England and Germany have a number of unshared targets (meanwhile, unless France wants to turn himself into England and just build fleets, he and Germany will find themselves stepping on one another's toes much sooner).

Even if you ally with England against France, you still need fleets. You can only use so many armies against France – without a naval influence, you get a stalemate line in a hurry, and it's very easy for Germany's armies to find themselves at the mercy of England's fleets (plus if you get to the mid-game with England as an ally and relatively few fleets, he will stab you at the first convenient chance he gets).

So how many fleets are we talking about? England might get a bee in his bonnet if you start cranking them out prolifically, and rightfully so (historically, in fact, Britain for many years operated by the Two-Power Standard – a policy to keep its navy as big as Europe's next two biggest navies put together). And that's fine. You're not trying to conquer the world with your fleets, like England is. You're just trying to cover your territory, lock down your coasts, extend your influence eastward, and get that “place in the sun” for the Kaiser. Odds are England's not going to let you into the North Sea – you have to accept that, and make contingency plans. And you can generally do that with three or four fleets for a six or eight center Germany.

All this anti-France plotting assumes, of course, that you have a competent England who is ready to take the fight to France, and not one that goes straightaway to bury his head in Scandinavia. We've talked a lot in the past about how England should leave Scandinavia alone until the endgame. But what should Germany do about Scandinavia? Obviously that depends greatly on how friendly your Russia is, but the fact is, Norway, Sweden and Saint Petersburg are centers you're going to need, and you're probably going to need them sooner than England would.

In any case, Germany's first step is to deal one of his western neighbors a crippling blow. If a good alliance with the other neighbor can be created, this can be done exceptionally quickly. At that point, Germany should certainly turn his attention to Russia. Let us continue to assume that Germany has a good relationship with England. By the midgame, the ideal situation is for

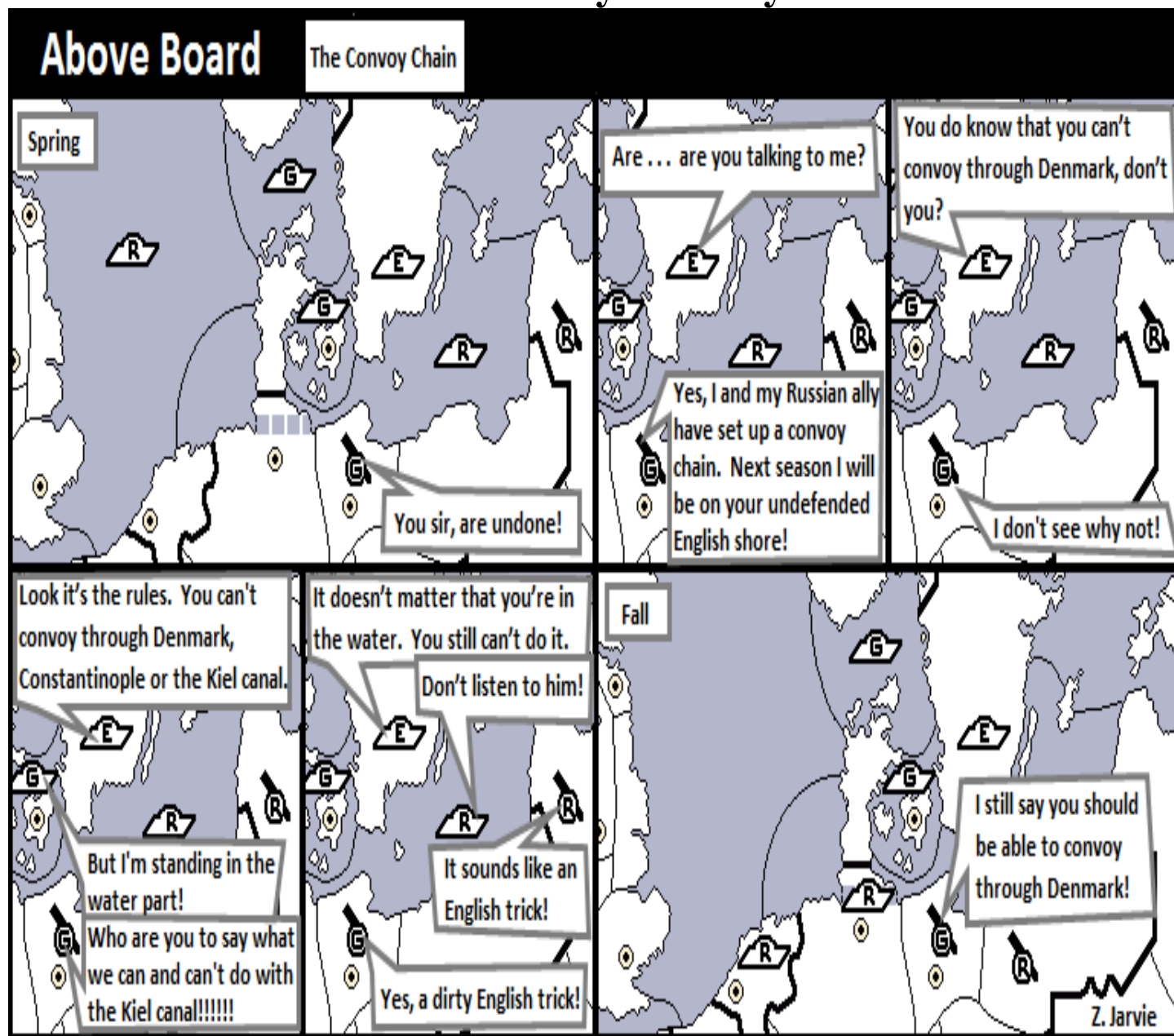
Germany to be pressing north and east through Scandinavia and Russia while England presses south through France, Iberia and the Mediterranean. This can, under favorable circumstances, lead to the rare occasion where Germany can be one of the outer pincers in a three-way game, as the natural flow of troop movement will eventually see Germany moving south through Russia while England moves east through the Mediterranean, which pins any and each of the southern powers remaining.

Granted, that relies on a lot of diplomacy. But the fundamental truth here is that Scandinavia is important

to Germany (more important than he often realizes) because Russia, once he finally swivels around to bear, is Germany's greatest threat (not counting, obviously, an initial French-English alliance, which renders any midgame talk moot anyhow).

At the end of the day, the point here is not to commit oneself blindly to one policy or doctrine, but rather to resist the natural German urge to color map squares gray in every direction like an old newsreel illustrating creeping Nazi darkness, and to equip oneself to take advantage the many opportunities created by Germany's substantial coasts and prodigious naval interests.

“Above Board” by Zachary Jarvie



The Great Gallimaufry Hoax

by Richard Walkerdine

Steve Doubleday was a very active player in the UK hobby (and a very good friend of mine) from the early 70s. He played in a large number of games in many different zines and enjoyed quite a successful hobby career. Then, very sadly, in 1974 he hit some personal problems (no details...he is still my closest friend) and decided the best course would be to drop out of the hobby. I do know the background and it was the right thing to do – but it left a lot of games with a missing player and a lot of editors wondering what the hell was going on.

Two years later his personal life was much more stable and his interest in Diplomacy was as keen as ever. He wanted to get back into the One True Hobby but how could he do so when so many zine editors still regarded him as just another dropout?

The answer emerged in our lounge one bleak November evening in 1976. Claire and I had invited Steve over for a meal and we were now enjoying a glass of wine and chatting about the world in general and the hobby in particular. Steve told us how much he wanted to get back into the hobby but how could he do that when he had caused so much upset from his multiple dropouts two years earlier?

I don't remember who came up with the idea but when it was suggested we all agreed it was perfect – Steve would organise a hoax. But not just any old hoax, this would be a monster! A hoax zine, with a hoax editor and offering a hoax Diplomacy variant! Not one single thing would be genuine. GALLIMAUFRY was born that evening and we decided the name of the editor would be Marcus Umney-Foote (we wanted a totally outrageous name just to see if we could get away with it). Steve had a (non-hobby) friend whose address he could use so as not to cause suspicion. Then we started designing the variant...

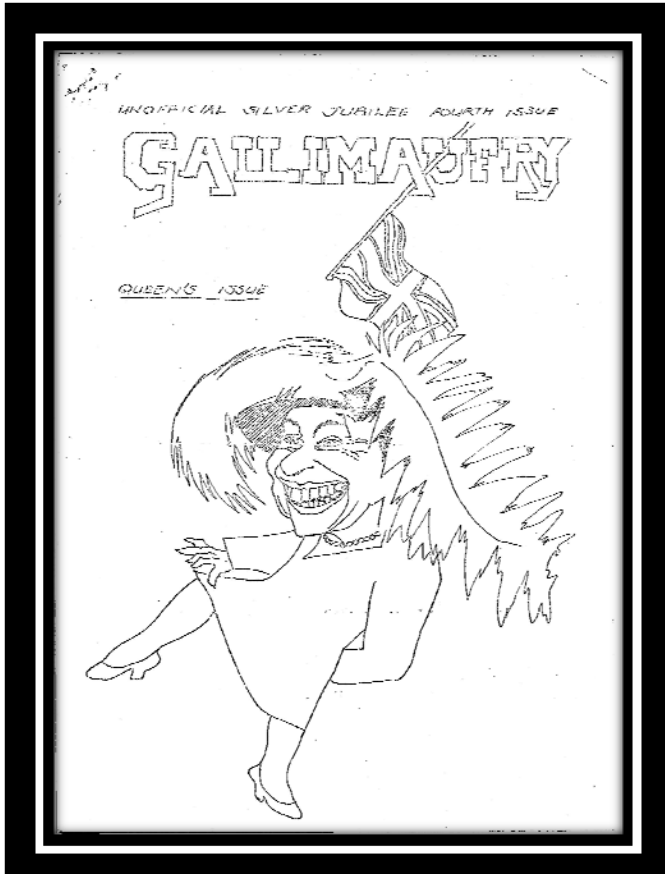
Steve decided to call it Cities Of Nowhen (initials CON – get it?) and we made sure it was totally unplayable. Seven boards, all interconnected, requiring 49 players, allowing space platforms, tunnels to cellars below each province and so on. In fact most of the zines at the time didn't have a readership of 49 so there was no way it could ever get started.

I sent out a flyer with the next edition of MAD POLICY announcing the new zine, the editor and the new variant. The response was staggering, with more than a dozen players desperate to sign up (I think Andy Davidson was first on the list), although a couple of people (Pete Cousins and Richard Sharp) were a bit suspicious and had to be taken to one side and told the truth – of course they were only too happy to play along once they knew. In fact Richard, who had already published his doubts, later announced in DOLCHSTOSS that he had gone to meet Marcus and was now sorry to have been suspicious. That was probably the icing on the cake.

In order to keep the waiting list looking respectable, we also invented some hoax players. One of these was an invention of mine, a young lady called Selena King, who actually took on a life of her own. By using the address of a friend at work I entered her into two or three variants in various zines and played her as if she was real. In one game her correspondence with Pete Birks got rather flirty – and of course he responded in kind. If he had known it was really me I would have loved to see the reaction (from a safe distance of course).

The zine ran for 9 months or more, with Steve (Marcus) constantly coming up with new rules and other changes to make sure the variant would never actually get started. Then, eventually, he admitted all. The hobby laughed, GALLIMAUFRY was established and Steve was accepted back. Job done.

Richard Walkerdine was, is, and always will be a name I will strive to drag back into writing for Diplomacy World.



You Are No Fun

By Conrad Woodring

I am writing this article somewhat in response to Mr. Cooley's article in the last Diplomacy World, and somewhat as a building block on the sagely advice he gave. Although I felt the title of the article put me off somewhat, I thought the article was very good, and I can say that I have even rethought my own play after reading it.

Recently there have been several efforts to liven up and grow the face-to-face Diplomacy hobby. The North American Diplomacy Federation recently conducted the March Madness of Diplomacy, in which clubs throughout the US and Canada were urged to pay homage to Caesar's brutal betrayal by competing for who could play the most games in the month of March. Furthermore, the active Diplomacy clubs in North America have been invigorated by an overall drive to grow and make something of our hobby. I am so excited to see the start of a revitalization of our hobby's face-to-face community.

Having read Steve Cooley's article, there is one very important item that he left out – The item that I think is probably the most vital to our success as a hobby. You might be a loser if:

...you are not any fun to play Diplomacy with.

It's so simple when those words are staring you in the face, but it took me a while to understand this. Our game is a game of competition, lying, backstabbing, treachery, deception and many more 'delightful' things. We get out there and we tear each other a part, the winners often clawing tooth and nail to the top of the blood bath. It's easy to get mad, it's easy to throw a fit and say 'fuck that guy.' It's easy to scream and holler and throw a temper tantrum. Why? Because it makes us feel better, because if we don't we are going to explode somewhere else in our bodies with a heart attack or an aneurism.



If you truly love Diplomacy however, you will not do this. If you truly love Diplomacy you want to see our hobby grow and if you want new players to enjoy the game and come back, you need to be a fun and pleasant person to play with (I know some of you are grinding your teeth right now). You need to be able to stab or be stabbed, smiling and laughing all the way. If our goal is to have fun when we play Diplomacy how can we expect anyone else to want to join our hobby and play the game if we are no fun to play with?



I can hear some of you saying "That's crap! This is Diplomacy, not some pity party for the 'losers.'" It's not strategically prudent to play that way." Well you are wrong, and you are a loser if you think so. I have watched the pleasant players have alliances thrown at their feet, and then have their allies apologizing for putting the pleasant players in a position where they were forced to stab their allies and win the game. It is very prudent strategy both in the game, in the meta-game, and in the meta-meta-game (the vitality of our hobby).

So please, for everyone's sake, please try to always have fun when you play (because if you are not having fun, then why are you playing?) and try to be fun to play with (because if you are not fun to play with, then why would anyone want to come back and play with you?). You will be surprised at how far pleasantry will take you.

Conrad Woodring continues his efforts to bring fun into the Diplomacy community in Houston, and everywhere else he can reach!

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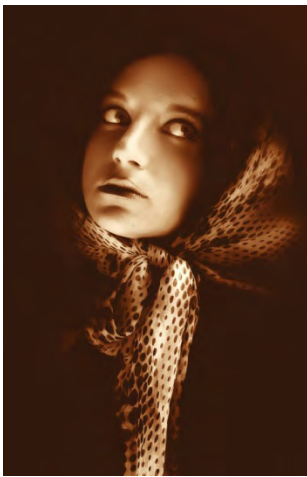
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Perestroika Diplomacy

By Larry Cronin

There is an old saying that "war is the extension of business *by other means*". The balance of economic and military concerns came to a critical head in the late 1980's. In those years Glasnost and Perestroika (Openness and Restructuring) were in bloom in the dying Soviet Empire. I had always marveled over the huge size of our Soviet and American military budget and wondered if there was some way to understand the balance between what is spent on arms vs. economic production. To simulate this I tried adding an economic factor to Allan Calhamer's great game *Diplomacy*. (I have never seen a game that so closely simulates the reality of politics.) Allan appreciated my effort and we kept in touch for many years via Christmas cards.



To test out my variant I started a Dip-zine of my own - appropriately called *Perestroika*. In it I published several iterations with evolving versions using a more intricate economy than just supply centers. Obviously some supply centers are more valuable in real life and some weapons more capable than others. To reflect this

I developed two things. First, instead of the simple value of 'one' that Dip supply centers have, in my variant a center could increase its 'infrastructure' by building economic might and each such center generated more economic value each year based on how much had been 'invested'. This economic output could be spent on further building of infrastructure or on military might. The other item was to come up with more powerful weapons incorporating the reality that more complicated weapons are vastly more expensive.

To do this I had the cost of these more effective systems go up by the mathematical square of their power, i.e. a weapon of double power cost two to the second power - or four - and a threefold stronger weapon (army or navy) cost nine, and so forth. These stronger weapons could engage other armies and supply centers based on their strength as if they were receiving support, and they inflicted damage on the economic strength of a supply center based on their strength (if the center was being defended).

Overall it played out very well, but I experienced a major perestroika (re-structuring) in my own life with the birth of three children in the nineties and my career as a publisher crumbled. My children would not let me read and write and I took up the hobby of toy trains for a several years. That was followed by my forming a company and a rock band for five years (The Hot Buttered Cheerleaders) and now I am back writing. I currently have published some poetry and am working on a set of novels.

Those interested in his work, or his upcoming novels (which sound interesting) may contact Larry Cronin at LCroninMD@msn.com

Perestroika V

by Larry Cronin

0. All rules as per *Diplomacy* save where amended below.

1. Each ordinary supply centre in 1900 has one Block of industrial production which generates one Point per year. A nation's Points are totaled each Winter yielding a yearly Gross National Product (GNP).

2. GNP: The GNP is added to each Power's Treasury each Autumn to increase the number of Points in the Treasury. Points can be used each winter to buy or maintain fleets and armies, or be re-invested in more Blocks to yield a larger GNP the following year, or be sent to another player as Loans or Trade.

3. Blocks: Blocks require one Point each to build and require no maintenance. Blocks can be built in any of the supply centers a nation controls as part of the Winter builds. The cost of Blocks never changes. The number of Blocks built in a

given supply centre cannot exceed the number of Blocks already existing in that supply centre. Note: buying a Block in effect yields a 100% return after the first year!

4. Military Units: The game starts in Winter 1900 without any armies or fleets. This reflects the reality that some nations never had fleets and some may not have had to mobilize. Build orders are submitted for Winter 1900 for military units and Blocks to be built in the supply centers owned, and Fleets and Armies cost one Point each at the beginning of the game. In Winter 1900 and Winter 1901 military units cost 1 Point each. Thereafter the cost of military units rises in line with Inflation. The new price is indicated by the game year - e.g. in Winter 1902 military units cost 2 Points to build or maintain, in Winter 1903 they cost 3 Points, Winter 1904, 4 Points etc.

5. Adjustments: The game begins as normal. In the Winter adjustments of each year one Point is earned for each Block owned. The number of Blocks in any given supply centre is signified after each centre's name (e.g. Edi5). The sum total of all supply centers is that Power's GNP. For example, if after Autumn 1905 England owns the following centers: Lpl10, Lon5, Edi7, Den3, Nwy5, Bel1, then the English GNP is 31 Points. This can be used to purchase up to 31 new building Blocks or build or maintain up to 6 units (the cost of units being 5 Points each in Winter 1905) with the remaining Point being used on a single Block, or being Loaned, Traded or left in the Treasury.

6. The Treasury: The Treasury can hold Points indefinitely and resembles liquid assets (the Blocks represent non-liquid investments). The Treasury has no particular location and may continue to exist after loss of all supply centres. Thus players may survive as a military Power once all supply centers are lost provided funding exists. Trade, however, may not be conducted unless a supply centre remains under the Power's control.

7. Loans: A Power may transfer Points to another Power at anytime. The GM will publish all loans in the game report.

8. Trade: Immediately after a Spring move or an Autumn move a Power may transfer Points from its Treasury to another Power's Treasury as Trade, the receiving Power will receive two times the amount sent as profitable Trade. Note: This form of activity can yield 300% per year - E.g. If Austria trades Italy 3 Points, then Italy receives 6 Points. If Italy send back the 6 Points then Austria receives 12! All Trade is published in the game report.

9. Trade with Neutrals: If Trade is sent to Neutrals then the GM will send the same amount back as Trade to the Power concerned the following Season. All profit accruing to a Neutral will be held in the Neutral's Treasury and spent each Winter by the GM in building Blocks in that Neutral. Any Power taking control of a Neutral seizes its Treasury.

10. Trade Routes: Trade may only occur if: (1) unoccupied lines of water and neutral spaces are open (i.e. a water route) or (2) the trading partners have contiguous bordering provinces which are not occupied by a third Power. Trade otherwise requires the permission of the Power(s) occupying the water, or in possession of the land through which a Trade route must go. It is up to the Power sending the trade to specify a Trade route (in default the GM will assume the shortest free route alphabetically and then the shortest and then the shortest route alphabetically). Permission can be given for trade in one direction only and should be included with Spring or Autumn moves. The viability of Trade is determined after moves and retreats (but before adjustments).

11. Overspending: Players are not allowed to overspend. If orders exceed resources, the GM will give building and maintain units a priority and after that will execute orders in the order in which they are written until the Treasury is emptied.

12. The Rubble Rule: Any supply centre which is unsuccessfully attacked will lose a number of Blocks equivalent to the number of valid attacks made on that centre plus valid supports, though no centre can be reduced to less than one Block. The effect of this rule is multiplied by the inflation factor (i.e. the number of the year, 01, 02, 03 etc.). For example an unsuccessful attack by two units on Brest in 1906 will result in Brest losing $(2 \times 6) = 12$ Blocks.

13. Plundering: Any unit standing in a supply centre can dismantle 2 Blocks in that season and thereby put one Point into its Treasury. One Block must always remain.

14. Disbanding: To encourage peace, units in supply centers may be disbanded during Winter adjustments provided that the power concerned does not also build any units anywhere else at the same time.

15. Victory: The goal of the game is to dominate Europe by having a GNP which exceeds half of all Europe's combined GNP.

You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....

(or why Jeff Foxworthy would probably be good at Diplomacy)

By Kit Jillings

Let's get something clear from the start. I am a jerk...or at least...like everyone but the most saintly I have the capacity to be a jerk. In particular, I have the capacity to be a jerk while playing Diplomacy. I didn't expect to discover this about my play, but I have. I also didn't expect the discovery to have a huge impact on how I think about the game, but it has. In fact, at this stage of my development as a player the most important precept I have developed to guide my play is about respect for my fellow players. It's what I call 'rule one'. Rule one states: "don't be a jerk!"¹

My main purpose in writing this article is to invite others to consider the usefulness of rule one as it relates to their own play. I confess that I am the sort of dreamer who believes that playing Diplomacy should be a civilized and even a civilizing experience, but my purpose here is not to make a moral argument for respect. My assumption is that the sharks reading this who relish the cut and thrust of 'robust' Diplomacy play would quickly dismiss such muddled thinking. No, my purpose is to argue that genuinely having respect for your fellow Diplomats is a matter of utility. I contend that it is central to good play.

What's that you say? You always have respect for your fellow players. Well, if that's true then I believe you are in possession of a key attribute that will help you be an effective player. However, writing from personal experience, I advocate that you take some time to reflect on whether your actual behaviours while playing Diplomacy are congruent with your espoused value of respecting your fellow players. To help in that process I have developed a number of subheadings under rule one (rules 1.1, 1.2 etc.) in the format of 'You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....'

Before I do that though there is one more thing I want to get clear. I have never met Steve Cooley, but I am sure he is a splendid person. Obviously Steve's article in Diplomacy World #108 (You might be a Loser if...) has prompted me to write this piece, but as I have already made clear the 'jerk' alluded to in the title is me and no one else. I found Steve's article contained much excellent advice with which I would concur, but it also seemed to me to contain some underlying assumptions (my interpretation) that I want to examine. I have been thinking about writing on this theme for some time so

Steve's use of the "You might be a..." riff is basically a convenient hook on which to hang my ideas. So...thanks Steve.

You'll need some background. I first played Diplomacy at College over 20 years ago, but I cannot remember actually finishing a game to any clear conclusion. I returned to the game relatively recently although I have been an avid and competitive player of strategic boardgames throughout the intervening period. I now play my Diplomacy online at Playdiplomacy.com (<http://www.playdiplomacy.com/index.php>). Let's flatter my ego and say that I am an intermediate player. Much of what I have to say here is a *cri de coeur* to my fellow Playdiplomacy.com players, but I believe it may have crossed over to our cousins in the face-to-face hobby.

Rule 1.1 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you are involved in a controversy, dispute or flame war

This is where the learning began for me. I didn't do any flaming, but I was flamed after what I considered to be a positional move, not even a stab. I was genuinely shocked. I know...someone uses the anonymity of the Internet to be abusive...who could have predicted that? Doh! I finished off the game, but troubled I didn't play again for a long time. I was certainly disturbed by the conduct of my fellow player and I thought about that a great deal, but I slowly realised that it wasn't only that keeping me from playing. I also needed to examine my own role.

I'll set the scene. I was France fighting Germany in a game initially dominated by Russia. Austria had mauled Turkey before being brutally stabbed by the Bear. A weakened Turkey then started helping Russia gut Austria. The Tsar looked so well set that he injudiciously left his Italian ally in the lurch just as I rallied a Grand Alliance. The tide turned. For three or four game years I essentially wrote the orders for England and the remnants of Turkey and Austria. Italy was broken. I conquered Germany. Russia was a spent force and Austria and Turkey began to retake centres. My stab on England was set up and I was ready to claim my solo. I was dominating the board. I was in full mastery of this game. I was having a great time. I was...a jerk.

It was a relatively small offence, but when the objection came to my move I was dismissive. I was highhanded in making plain that I did not care about the objection since they were unable to do anything about it. That's all it took. I was a bit of a jerk and their reaction was completely inappropriate. One could stop there and just dismiss my opponent as the jerk, and there might be

¹ Actually, I use a more colourful term than jerk. However, whereas it's ok to use that term when thinking about myself inside my own head I have toned it down here lest I subvert my own purpose and end up offending anyone too much!

validity in that, but not much value in terms of improving one's own play. That's the great value of rule one - it challenges you to critically examine your own conduct and play. The initial offence was in the mind. I was so pleased with my own play that I became prideful. That led to my communication error. If it wasn't arrogance then at the very least it was insufficiently humble! On this occasion it did not cost me the game (though there were other costs), but turning a player into Captain Ahab to your Moby Dick can never be a good idea. If you are involved in a number of these controversies then take some time to consider rule 1.1. Some players seem to take the approach that it is always the other guy who is in the wrong. Let's be generous and assume that such a player is largely correct most times, I still believe more introspection would serve to improve their play.

Of course, there can be value in pinpricking an opponent. Recently, I wanted to ensure that a Russian army in Silesia did not move to Munich but rather bounced my French Army Munich in Berlin. (I had other plans for the unit Russia might have expected to follow up into Munich...) I demanded Berlin and initiated a back and forth. By the time I was told that Russia was "putting his foot down" over Berlin I was reasonably confident that I had got what I wanted. Of course, it's also possible that some players enjoy being a jerk and get their kicks from getting a rise out of other players. If that's the case then I fear for our hobby. I don't want it to be a repository for those trending towards the sociopathic end of the personality spectrum.² Actually, maybe I shouldn't think about that one too much...

Rule 1.2 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you believe that someone else's play or philosophy of play diminishes your own enjoyment of the game

This one might seem a little abstract, but it has already been well articulated by Christian MacDonald in Diplomacy World #106.³ I believe that strong players obey rule one, and one of the ways to follow rule one is just to accept each board as it is. The relative experience and skill of the players or their personal approaches to the game are respected and dealt with. They are just (important) pieces of data that need to be continually reappraised and factored into one's own play as part of the remorseless pursuit of 18 SCs.

Often, it seems to be a cultural norm within the hobby to complain about the poor play of others, and to consider that weak play to have diminished one's own experience and/or chances of success. I believe this is flawed thinking. A genuine commitment to respecting

² Perhaps these characters are who Andrew Goff was alluding to in Diplomacy World #105 when he talked about "dealing with the psychos" (Taking your Game to the Next Level)

³ 3 Things I learned at World DipCon 2009 – lesson #2 "It just 'is.'"

everyone's right to play no matter how highly you rate your own abilities relative to theirs is the start point for learning how to cope effectively with what everyone brings to the table. Each board is unique, and presents its own puzzles and challenges that are to be enjoyed. I metaphorically shake my head when a player on Playdiplomacy.com complains on the forum about how "one idiot" ruined their game.

More broadly, there is a debate that periodically re-appears on the Playdiplomacy.com forum and which will never die – what is the 'correct' approach to play? The Soloists debate with the Drawmongers with a few "I never stab" Care Bears thrown in. For the record, I am a soloist but I don't join in with those complaining that players who form an early alliance and never break it are spoiling their games. Rule one embraces and respects all styles of play. The key is to be clear on your own goals and then pursue them. However, to be effective in that pursuit you must accept that other styles exist legitimately. Hell, trying to work out what 'type' people are, or perhaps what type they think they are, is all part of the fun. Many players who claim to almost never stab seem to take out the knife pretty regularly, and avowed soloists keep drawing because they consistently make percentage choices that trend to a draw. Exploring all this is just part of finding the right diplomatic strategy to manipulate the play of others to suit your objectives. Each board is a dynamic social system to be discovered and shaped, and in my view surfing its currents are best done from a philosophy of respect. Sometimes managing this complexity will prove too much, in which case you just weren't good enough – you'll do better next time. Besides, life is too short and Diplomacy requires too much commitment and time to allow your enjoyment of the game to be dependent on someone else's choices!

Rule 1.3 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you attribute your loss to the actions of another player

This is essentially an application of rule 1.2. In his article Steve Cooley relates a story of how a minor power broke a stalemate line allowing another player to solo. From Steve's account it certainly sounds like a terrible move. Now this one hurt so I'm not going to pick at that sore, not least because I was not there and I don't know what happened. Nevertheless, Steve's tale did raise some questions for me especially since this move resulted from "much negotiation" and significant persuasive efforts by the eventual winner.⁴

Therefore, let's invent a similar hypothetical. Imagine you are the biggest power amongst 3 or 4 relatively minor powers. You are taking the lead in rallying a stalemate line against a 16-centre-power going for the

⁴ Steve Cooley, You Might be a Loser if... Diplomacy World #108

solo. After titanic efforts all seems set when the smallest of your alliance allows the board leader across the stalemate line. S***! Surely, this is a classic example of an incompetent ruining a good game of Diplomacy. Well, maybe not. To cite Christian MacDonald again: "I am starting to learn that their poor play is not *their* failure, it's *mine*."⁵

The first thing to understand is that people often make decisions that are contrary to their self-interest when compared to some objective measure. (In Diplomacy this might be long-term SC count, diplomatic strength or the ability to draw rather than lose outright). Sadly, we do not have to look far in life to find countless examples of self-sabotaging behaviour on an individual, societal or global level. Furthermore, it's not uncommon for those who exhibit these behaviours to be written off as Losers. I won't comment further lest this article go completely off track, but I will argue that in the context of Diplomacy dehumanising a player by labelling them a Loser (or idiot or moron) even if it is just in your own mind is an error. Decisions that are contrary to self-interest are not aberrant. They are (regretfully) a norm of human behaviour and since Diplomacy is played by humans the aspirant player will integrate this into their thinking. In other words, we should anticipate that players can and will make decisions contrary to their 'best interests'. In fact, that's vital - otherwise we couldn't win. Consequently, to me it seems perverse to be surprised or disgusted when the opposite outcome - a loss - results from someone else's poor decisions. If you follow rule 1.3 you'll be asking yourself why you didn't spot that it was going to happen, and what you could have done to head it off.

So let's look at this problem again. Why would anyone make a self-harming decision like allowing a board leader across a stalemate line? (Assuming we are ruling out the answer... because they're a Loser). Any combination of fatigue, resignation, cracking under sustained pressure, a lack of self-confidence or panic would be plausible, but I'll indulge myself with another possible explanation - that within the context of (often perplexing) human behaviour it was in their self interest. To explore what I mean, let's tap into another recent Diplomacy World theme - the wisdom of Science Fiction: "When a creature has developed into one thing, he will choose death rather than change into his opposite."⁶ A choice of 'Diplomacy suicide' may be conscious or subconscious but it can have its origins in the incongruity of a player's actual position with their self-image. In other words, at some point they will choose destruction rather than perpetuate this crisis.

⁵ Christian MacDonald, 3 Things I learned at World DipCon 2009, Diplomacy World #106

⁶ Scytale - a Bene Tleilaxu master as written by Frank Herbert in Dune Messiah

Whether it is objectively valid or not matters little, but maybe - just like you - they see themselves as an intelligent and successful player and/or person outside Diplomacy. However, their current game circumstances are painfully corroding over a long and intense period that self-image. With so much ego invested in the game's outcome an objectively poor move might be a way to reassert control and self-esteem. They consciously or subconsciously want to show that they have a prominent role to play in the outcome, and that they are therefore important. In this sense they are making a decision which is in their *emotional* self-interest. Consequently, a player might allow themselves to be persuaded that their terrible move is a good idea; that the stalemate line can be re-established later, and that in the meantime they can grab a supply centre or two. Perhaps they imagine they will ultimately share victory with the board leader. It does not matter how fantastical a scenario is, it is potentially believable if the psychological need to believe is great enough.

Maybe this is too much pseudo-science. Let's keep it simple. Perhaps the board leader was just nicer to the minor power than you. It's possible to imagine that whether consciously or not you were already thinking of this other player as in some way inferior. That mindset then leaked into how you communicated with them - spoken or written word, your tone, or body language. They felt undervalued, as if their orders were being taken for granted because any fool could see they were the 'only' logical thing to do. I can hear you objecting: "but a good player wouldn't be influenced by such considerations when their very survival was at stake." My counter is what does it matter what a 'good player' would do? All that matters is what this player will do. A strong player is comfortable with the idea that not all the other players are 'good', they just 'are' and plays accordingly. This is another of rule one's merits. It challenges you to develop your empathy skills. Note empathy, not sympathy. Cultivating ruthlessness is something I also advocate for the effective Diplomacy player. Empathy, on the other hand, is about one's capacity to understand emotionally what another is experiencing or in other words being able to put yourself in their shoes. After all, isn't this what Edi Birsan has been trying to tell us all for years? The real pieces are the players! Personally, this is why I find the game so compelling. It is not just a test of my intellect, but my humanity.

Let's speculate even more. Maybe a significant number of players are similar to me in that their perception is that cognition isn't their main problem. It is navigating the affective domain that presents the bigger challenge. For me, trying to follow rule one is a cognitive route (a perceived strength) into managing the affective domain (a perceived weakness). I value it because I have come to believe that Diplomacy is about the interplay between both domains and that both are equal partners in determining the actions of most players. Perhaps I am

not the only Diplomacy player for whom pride (the most deadly of deadly sins) is an Achilles heel and therefore maybe rule one can serve others. It requires that you maintain respect and empathy for your opponents thus enabling you to continually assess how a player feels about the game, themselves, and the other players including you. In fact, periodically do a self-check on how you feel about all of the above! Any mismatch between current game reality and self-image can lead to all kinds of erratic behaviours – flaming, dropping out and terrible play are just some. In my original tale I was a jerk, but in being so I broke the spell. My opponent was suddenly faced with the cold reality that they were impotent to stop me and in fact had been used for the last four game years. Who the hell wants to see themselves like that? Spitting vitriol is one way to ego-protect in such a situation (although admittedly an immature one). If this is beginning to sound like a cheesy self-help book on emotional intelligence I apologise, but maybe reading one of those things might help!



Rule 1.4 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you forget that it is every player's right to order their units as they see fit

In some ways this just seems an obvious reiteration of the basic game rules. However, I hinted at this in rule 1.3. Sometimes players can fall into the trap of declaring one set of orders so irrefutably and objectively 'right' that they give the impression that they think they are entitled to dictate another player's orders. Now having another player write the exact orders you suggest is of course an ideal, but if you ever give the impression of demanding or expecting your suggestions to be adopted as a right you will likely be disappointed soon enough. There are no bigger rapport killers than being judgemental or condescending, and that's why rule one is here to help. By being consciously respectful of this dynamic you maintain rapport, and building and maintaining rapport is fundamental to effective play.

To convey how I try and think about rule 1.4 I'll share an analogy that helps me. I think of the right to order (or not order) one's own units as being as close to a 'constitutional' right as a Diplomacy player has within the context of the game. Supply centres on the other hand

are always earned and I have a right to try and capture yours! Put it another way – no set of orders are objectively right, they are only right in the sense that they are ultimately written by the properly constituted authority - the Sultan for Turkey, the Kaiser for Germany and so on. The competence of that authority is not relevant to the 'rightness'. This one can be a challenge, but I invite you to embrace the idea that no matter how illogical or infuriating you may regard a set of orders it is every player's absolute right to order their units as they see fit. Though you will naturally seek to influence their judgement you do so while acknowledging that ultimately they are best placed to decide what is in their self-interest. This is because you understand that whether consciously or not most players allow factors beyond the pure strategic or tactical logic of the board to impact on what they consider their self-interest.

I'll try and illustrate the utility of this approach with an example. Recently I was playing France with Russia again my main rival. Italy was my long time ally and he and Turkey were nicely bogged down with a near stalemate in the Med and Balkans. Germany and Austria had been eliminated. Consequently, I had grown to 12 SCs to Italy's 6. Russia's fortunes were waning and the Bear was crying "France is going for the solo". Italy was jittery and I was in the tricky position of plotting the solo while trying not to look like it. The unpredictable 'x-factor' was an unreliable 4 SC England who was my 'ally' in the North. Now, in online play NMRs and surrenders are the bane of 'serious' players and provoke regular complaints. The game had a 7-day turn around and had already been in progress for over 3 months in real time. The commitment was significant. I had not heard from England for 3 weeks and he had NMRed (not for the first time) the previous turn. I was doing an end around Britain because pinching out English centres was a *de facto* stab on Italy, and although I had enough cover to make any Italian stab on me ineffective I had (for diplomatic and tactical reasons) insufficient forces near him to make any effective attack of my own. Then, one hour before a deadline England suddenly messages me! He makes some vague mention of Norway, but does not communicate any clear plan or indication of his orders. I know I will not hear back from him before the deadline, and so I have to guess his moves and re-arrange my plans as best I can to try and avoid unhelpful bounces and cut supports. He NMRs! A message, but no orders entered – S***! Without getting too far into the details Russia gains the North Sea. I am....very disappointed.

What were my options? Normally unreliable players are just attacked – simple, except in this case Italy would surely switch sides unless he is incredibly trusting! I might tough it out to 18, but I'm not convinced. A less happy outcome looks at least as likely. It turns out that in real life the English player is 'kicking back'. This game isn't high on his agenda. Infuriating! Doesn't he realise my commitment level and what he therefore 'owes' me and the other players? Take a breath, and remember

rule 1.4. I write to England. I am not saying this will always happen, but we manage an honest dialogue about our contrasting approaches to the game and what impact that is having. I make plain that I respect their right to approach the game anyway they see fit, and I offer to work with whatever level of commitment they can provide. Rapport is strengthened. Incredibly, they never NMR again and their subsequent communication is excellent. Even better – they are extra keen to follow my order suggestions even to the point of conveying out of London just as I sail in! All part of a large simultaneous SC grab against England and Italy for the solo. You see I am a jerk. Following rule one doesn't mean you turn into a Care Bear. I can almost hear you saying – “oh, so what you mean is be nice to people and then backstab them – of course, I do that already.” No, I'm not saying that. Well, actually that plan has some merit, but I am saying more than that. Rule one isn't an act. A respectful approach has to be consciously applied. That's how it facilitates good play.

I'll offer another example as an appeal to my fellow players at Playdiplomacy.com. One weakness of much online play is that instead of being alive with intrigue the midgame is diplomatically flat. Players have settled into alliances and their patterns are set. Consequently, one scenario that regularly appears is two or three players aiming for a shared draw, but with two or more minor powers refusing to concede.⁷ Sometimes the big fish get irritated at what they see as intransigence, and what I consider to be “why don't you quit already?!” bullying breaks out in the Shoutbox (public press). My own theory is that some players are perhaps participating in more games than is conducive to good play and they just want to get this one done and bag some points.⁸ I think that is a shame on many levels, and a clear breach of rule 1.4. I suspect that all sorts of possibilities for realigning the board and working with the minor powers are being missed. Hopefully, the minor powers realise this and are working that angle. Either way, it is their absolute right to play on and all the harassment is quite unnecessary.

Rule 1.5 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if...you didn't see it coming

I'm not necessarily referring to stabs here. We can all get stabbed and when we do the more important questions are – how well did I have it covered tactically and diplomatically, and consequently is it crippling to my

⁷ On Playdiplomacy.com all surviving players have to vote for a draw for the game to end, but not all survivors necessarily form part of the draw – a 4-way draw is the largest draw allowed.

⁸ On Playdiplomacy.com a solo is worth 12 points. Those sharing in a draw split the 12 points evenly – i.e. players in a 3-way draw get 4 points each

game? This rule is often for less dramatic situations. For example, I sometimes miss effective tactical options deployed by my opponents – I didn't just guess wrong I didn't even consider that choice! That is always a good wakeup call, especially if you think of yourself as a decent tactician. Use it to refresh your commitment to rule one. If you're like me then your natural unconscious tendency will be to drift away from rule one. Often when I re-examine the situation I missed the move because I was underestimating another player. Perhaps I was forgetting that current SC count is not always a measure of player skill or that just because I have bested someone before does not guarantee I will do so again. In short, I had insufficient respect and therefore I did not look deep enough.



Rule 1.6 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....someone throws a solo to ensure you lose

Maybe it's just me, but as someone getting back into the hobby and doing my background reading I did not expect to find thrown solos when studying demonstration games. So although this is similar to rule 1.1, I include it here as it seems worthy of special comment. Of course as the 'target' of a thrown solo you could just dismiss it with: “He's thrown a solo just because I did my happy dance when I stabbed him and kept making lewd jokes about his mother?! What's wrong with that wimp?” On the other hand, since someone else gaining a solo is

presumably not your objective some self-reflection might be in order. Whether the other parties were over-sensitive or not hardly matters. More important is to ask how did their state of mind develop, why didn't I spot it and how could I have avoided the loss?



Rule 1.7 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you throw a solo

I anticipate that many players will strongly disagree with this one so I'll get some of my defence in first by emphasising the word "might" which applies to this and all the other rules. I confess I have a gut-level abhorrence for the idea of throwing a solo, but I do accept that threatening it and then perhaps following through with that threat is appropriate in certain circumstances. Steve Cooley cites a decent example in his article – other powers dotting you while maintaining a stalemate line. Nevertheless, I cannot shake the feeling that when it is used by a player the main drivers behind their decision are often likely rooted more in emotion than logic, and consequently whatever reasons are given are largely rationalisations. To return to my earlier musings, this choice of Diplomacy death is potentially about re-asserting control and self-worth as much as anything else. It is a grand gesture aligned with the player's emotional self-interest - on some level it's about saving face and/or gaining revenge. In other words, if my piece of amateur psychology has any merit then some thrown solos and some incompetent play have identical origins. I therefore find it ironic that one of these behaviours is widely accepted as legitimate within the culture of 'good' Diplomacy players while the other

attracts their contempt and fervent wishes to see it eradicated from tournament play.

Rule 1.8 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if....you decide to 'teach another player a lesson'

This one is a red flag for me. Diplomacy can be an intense, stressful and cruel game. It can be hard enough for the average narcissist to see their plans for domination shattered without then setting their heart on somehow getting back at another player. If that plan also fails the rage is likely to be fearful. Can Diplomacy-burn out by far off? It's time to reflect on the virtues of rule one and how you came to depart from its guidance.

Rule 1.9 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if...you think someone else is being a jerk

Let he who is without sin....



Rule 1.10 You might be a Diplomacy Jerk if...you bite back

Of course the greatest test of the golden rule – do as you would be done by – comes when the other party is not obeying it. Always re-read and edit your messages before clicking send. Perhaps save a draft and come back to it later. Similarly, by all means vent in that AAR report – get it all out - but don't post it. An AAR is not the forum for continuing the war by other means. Of course, if people start obeying this rule then AARs will become

considerably less entertaining for the rest of us but it still seems like sound advice to me. In fact, reading AARs from games that resulted in solos (including thrown ones) it has often struck me that the winner is referred to in respectful ways by their peers and that those peers seem to believe that the winner respects them. They save their barbed comments for the other b*****s that screwed up their chances. Is this a coincidence? I think it is empirical evidence for the power of rule one.

So what about my own story? How did I fare? For a while I ignored the abusive messages that arrived after each adjudication, but eventually I weakened and replied. For a long time I couldn't face re-reading it. When I did I was largely relieved. It was acerbic at points, but overall reasoned and factual. It was also completely pointless, and its great length alone rendered it intrinsically pompous. Chalk up another failure to live up to the wisdom of rule one.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have emphasised the importance of the affective domain as a key determinant of player decisions in Diplomacy. I have therefore argued for the utility of respect as a way of thinking one's way into the domain of values, beliefs and emotions. I believe that this may help players anticipate and avoid the damaging effects of variable play and perhaps understand their own 'variability'. Concerns about standards of play seem to be part of the hobby zeitgeist. In this piece I have tried to tap into that by arguing that your personal standards of conduct are integral to the standard of your play. It's my way of trying to influence all of us to begin the process of examining our own conduct while playing Diplomacy. Along the way, I have therefore challenged some Diplomacy behaviours which may or may not represent poor manners, but which I consider poor play. Feel free to let me know that it's all nonsense; just try not to be a jerk about it...

An After-thought

While I have your attention (and if you made it this far hopefully I do) I'd like to comment directly on a value-judgement intrinsic to much of this article - a respect for the right of all players to participate in our hobby in all contexts. I have touched on just some of the flaws associated with playing Diplomacy at Playdiplomacy.com. As a community it is far from perfect, but it is founded on an important principle - unrestricted access to all.⁹ This is something I prize. After all, it enabled me to start playing again, and I try to keep that in mind when I feel like complaining about poor play, NMRs or surrenders. In fact, rule one could be

characterised as thinking that trends to the inclusive rather than the exclusive, and if you scale it up I feel it might have some utility for us as a hobby community.



I read with interest Andy Hull's and Conrad Woodring's article in Diplomacy World #108¹⁰ about reinvigorating NADF. I wish the enterprise well and perhaps I should stop there as I am not a member of the face-to-face hobby. Nonetheless, I also note that they sensibly wish to reach out to online players, perhaps like me. So, as the face-to-face hobby tries to attract its Internet cousins I wish to emphasise that inclusion is a core value for many online players. For me, there is a standout line in Steve Cooley's article: "Thousands of dollars are wasted every year by Losers who travel about the country without any hope of winning the tournament."¹¹ Why is the money wasted, and who should properly make that judgement if not the spender of that money? So what if I am still terrible after going to loads of these things? Is a chance of winning the tournament the only legitimate reason for wanting to participate in and enjoy a face-to-face Diplomacy tournament? These questions are relevant because I believe that, for the want of any other opportunity, many online players would likely try face-to-face play for the first time at a tournament. It seems to me therefore that tournaments properly have a dual function - as a competition and as a self-sustaining recruitment tool. Apart from the obvious barriers of cost and logistics I think the biggest barrier for online players is the fear that they will not be entering an inclusive environment. I for one know that I would not be equipped to play my best game (which is moderate) coping with the time-pressure and intensity of competitive face-to-face play. Nonetheless, I'd be tempted to give it a go if I wasn't so concerned at the thought of what reactions my imperfect attempts might produce. Thanks for reading.

I want to thank Kit for such a thorough and well-thought-out (and well-intentioned) article!

⁹ And for the vast majority it is also free. You can choose to pay a small annual fee for premium membership which grants you access to variants and some other privileges. However, there are also routes through which you can acquire premium membership free.

¹⁰ North American Diplomacy Federation (NADF) - Promoting the organized, face-to-face play of the world's greatest game.

¹¹ Steve was not writing in his capacity as a member of NADF, but he is NADF member at large

MANORCON XXVIII

Stamford Hall, University of Leicester. 2pm Friday 16th July – 2pm Monday 19th July 2010

If you've never been to ManorCon before, you might want to start by reading the back of the flyer first. If you're a regular attendee, then keep reading.

Following on from last year's successful convention, ManorCon will once again be held at Stamford Hall, University of Leicester, in 2010. Things will be very similar to last year. We have the same hall, the same rooms in Stamford House, and the same accommodation. We even have the same people on the committee!

As ever, single accommodation is available at the convention. For those people who want twin accommodation, we recommend The Regency Hotel, which is just under a mile from the convention. The contact details are The Regency Hotel, 360 London Road, Stonygate, LE2 2PL. Telephone 0116 270 9634. It offers double rooms for £62 per night. If you want to take this option, we recommend booking early, as it filled up last year.

Apart from that, ManorCon will be pretty much the same as the successful formula we had in 2009. Running from Friday lunchtime to Monday lunchtime, it will have all the regular tournaments, plus one or two possible new ones – depending on the success (or otherwise) of the latest new game releases. It will once again feature the Second Hand Game Sale on Friday and Saturday, the Pop Quiz on Saturday evening, and the Treasure Hunt on Sunday afternoon (which will hopefully be shorter than the 2008 and 2009 editions!), as well as more games than you can shake a stick at.

Also this year, ManorCon will once again be hosting the Spielchamps on Saturday. Teams of four players take part in four games each, with the winners earning the right to represent the UK at the World Championships in Germany. The competition has been a mixed success in the last couple of years, but with a big promotional push, and the games selected to make sure everybody knows them, it's going to be a much bigger event this year. If you are interested in taking part, then either form a team, or let the organisers know you're looking for a team, and then turn up immediately after breakfast on Saturday for the start of the tournament.

ManorCon works because of the number of people who volunteer to help. One such way that you can help is by spending an hour on the registration desk. If you could spare an hour of your time, it would be appreciated. Please tick the appropriate box on the booking form. **P.T.O.**

To book, please complete BOTH SIDES OF the form and return by 12th June to: Neil Duncan, MANORCON, 25 Sarum Hill, Basingstoke, Hants, RG21 8SS, UK. Please make cheques payable to: ManorCon.

This form should be returned to Neil before 12th June 2010. PRE-BOOKINGS CANNOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER THIS DATE. However, there will **probably** be some rooms available if you arrive and pay on the door (we wouldn't like to guarantee which type of room will still be available at this stage). Please note that room prices will be higher if not booked in advance.

PLEASE DO NOT USE RECORDED DELIVERY. Bookings sent by recorded delivery may be significantly delayed until Neil can get to the sorting office to collect them. If you send your booking by recorded delivery, and this causes your booking to not be received until after the deadline, then your booking will not be accepted.

The prices are subject to variation in the event of VAT changes. Cancellations may be made up to June 12th 2010 for a full refund. It is the responsibility of delegates to look after their valuables. ManorCon cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items.

Data Protection Act : Details of your booking are stored on computers. We do not sell our mailing lists to any other individuals or organisations, but we may share them with other games conventions.

Please tick here if you would like information about other UK Conventions to be sent to you via email ☐

Please sign here.....

If you've never been to ManorCon before and are wondering what it's all about, ManorCon is the largest board games convention in the UK. It's held annually in July, in one of the halls of residence of Leicester University. Approximately 200 gamers come along for a weekend of intensive board gaming, some entering tournaments, others simply playing socially. It's great fun, and makes a change from your humdrum everyday life. If you've never been before, why not try it? Further details of the tournaments and other events can be found below.

With so many people at the Convention, you should be able to find plenty of other people who want to play the same sort of games as you. Either look around for someone setting up a game and ask if you can join in, or look for a group already playing a game, and ask if they know where you can get into a game. If you see a game that looks interesting, then ask about it. Most people are happy to teach a new player. Alternatively, try asking one of the Tournament Directors to help get you into a game, or if you don't know how to find him, one of the ManorCon Committee will be "on duty" to answer queries, solve problems, etc., throughout the weekend – we can help to point you in the right direction.

The aim of ManorCon is to play games and have fun, and our aim is to help you to succeed in doing both!

Tournaments will include: Diplomacy, 18XX, Dominion, Puerto Rico, St Petersburg, Acquire, Race for the Galaxy, Midnight Party and Croquet. There will also be plenty of non-tournament games on offer – far too numerous to mention! There will also be a games stall, a second hand games sale, a pop quiz and a treasure hunt.

For further details please contact:

Steve Jones, 59 Sudeley Walk, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8JH, UK Tel. +44 (0)1234 405878

email us at info@manorcon.org.uk

or check out our website at <http://www.manorcon.org.uk>

To book, please complete BOTH SIDES of the form below and return to Neil Duncan, address overleaf.

NB. Please complete a SEPARATE form for EACH person booking

Alternatively, you can book online via the ManorCon Website, <http://www.manorcon.org.uk>.

Name				Male/Female
Address				
Telephone no.		email:		
If this will be your first time at ManorCon, please tick here: <input type="checkbox"/>	If you are willing to help out on the registration desk, please tick here: <input type="checkbox"/>	If you are a qualified first-aider, please tick here: <input type="checkbox"/>	If you wish to take part in the UK Spielchamps, please tick here: <input type="checkbox"/>	
If non-resident, please tick to indicate which days you will be attending: <div style="text-align: center;"> Friday <input type="checkbox"/> Saturday <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday <input type="checkbox"/> Monday <input type="checkbox"/> </div>				
Registration fee: £5 for one day, £8 for the weekend. (NB. If paying on the door, prices rise to £6 and £10)		Enter £5 or £8		
Accommodation: <input type="checkbox"/> £31 per night for a single <input type="checkbox"/> £49 per night for a single en-suite (NB. If paying on the door, prices will be £2 extra per person per night)		Friday	Enter £31/£49	
		Saturday	Enter £31/£49	
		Sunday	Enter £31/£49	
		Total enclosed:		

P.T.O.

Luck in Diplomacy, or Why Do the Simple When You Can Attempt the Spectacular?

By Richard Hannon

Diplomacy is often touted as a combat system with no luck involved. There are no dice or cards, so success depends on tactics and negotiations. But is that really as luck free as Allan B. Calhamer would have us believe? Consider a relatively common example: England and France in the Fall of 01.



England has taken the advice given by Joshua Danker-Dake in recent issues and opened to the Channel. France, as often happens, opened to the Mid-Atlantic. England has choices: shoot for Brest, go for MAO, or use that fleet to support operations elsewhere, such as Belgium. While negotiations and future considerations differ from game to game, I think it is clear this is not a luck-free scenario. England cannot, with certainty, know what France will do. If England goes for Brest, the fleet could be bounced by F MAO, giving France the opportunity to build in Brest. If England goes for MAO, he must hope that France covers Brest, denying a build in Iberia and the ability to build a northern fleet.

Whichever orders are sent, it is clear that England must get lucky somehow. Similarly, France has to be a bit unlucky in the orders sent to really be put into a tough position. Though units are all of equal strength, this has the whiff of a 50-50 scenario about it. Each power will look to maximize its own position. But in this case the best for England is capturing Brest, which unfortunately sets up the best for France—a bounce in Brest. There's that 50-50 again. If England or France is shortsighted enough to reveal their specific orders to their "allies," then they deserve what they get, so let's assume that each power is acting outside of diplomatic knowledge.

In this case, one has to decide what kind of player you are. Are you a conservative player who seeks to shore up home territory and see what happens, or are you a player who gambles for early builds knowing full well that may spell doom? Are you a win-at-all-cost player, or will you be happy with a three way draw? If you are a safety-first player, you have to take the move that defends against your opponent's major gain. If you are a win-only

type of player, you must seek to maximize your own gain. In my experience, most players are safety-first. They plan defensively and expect others to do the same. This leads to a predictability in tactics as players jab at each other and make minimal gains. This also leads to a bluntness of attacking momentum or a grinding slog where a third party reaps more of the spoils than the two embroiled in it. What, then, should France do when faced with this scenario?

A safety-first player would likely cover Brest. That's a fine move as it guarantees freedom of your home center. If you bounce with the English Channel fleet, then build there...so much the better. If England moves elsewhere, then count your blessings and leave that fleet moored in Brittany for much of the game (As you can see, I'm not a huge fan of the second outcome). But why do the simple, expected move when you can attempt the spectacular? England will likely plan for a cover Brest/Iberian build dichotomy. Don't limit your options that way! What if you took the Channel that England is almost sure to vacate? Surely Germany would be amenable to gaining the North Sea with your help—extract concessions once you are in there! Likewise, how will England respond to a fleet in the North Atlantic? Most Englands view the surrounding waters as theirs by birthright and tend to act a bit irrationally when they are invaded successfully. You likely can force England to back off of his attack merely with one movement of a fleet. If Brest can be covered by your army (which depends on your opening movement set) then by all means do so. If you can't, even the loss of that home center may be offset by gains, both real and psychological, made by advancements in the northern waters.

This tactical puzzle is just one of many that arise during each Diplomacy game. The principles are true and can be applied to any of them. Let's review: 1. Tactics often boil down to a 50-50 guess. 2. Look outside the normal options for something your opponent wouldn't expect. It is likely to succeed and may cause them to reverse their forward momentum to root you out. 3. If you can punch enough holes in your opponent's attack, you may be able to turn their allies to your side. Don't be afraid to gamble a neutral center that's "yours" (as in the Ignorway discussed last issue) or even a home center that can't be followed up on (as in the Brest scenario discussed above) for a psychologically damaging, ally garnering, momentum bursting move behind enemy lines. Don't settle for the simple. Attempt the spectacular!

Bored? Try a Diplomacy Bourse!

by Richard Walkerdine

The 'Bourse' is not really a Diplomacy variant but a separate game to be played alongside a Diplomacy game. The rules are believed to have been created by Don Miller around 40 years ago and it used to carry the Miller Number suffix 'cr'. It's a clever little game and a lot of fun – it also demonstrates how wealth can be created from virtually nothing (as many bankers and financiers seem to know). The following set of rules is taken from a flyer I sent out with MAD POLICY #44 in 1975.

Rules to Diplomacy Bourse

1: Each player starts with 1000 units of each currency of the nations in the Diplomacy game: Crowns, Pounds, Francs, Marks, Lira, Roubles, Piastres. All are equal in value at the start of the game.

2: The deadline for Bourse orders is the same as for the Diplomacy game. The orders are in two parts; SELLING and BUYING. You must always buy as much as you sell every turn. This is most important – see below.

3: At the start of the Diplomacy game one unit of each currency is worth one US Dollar. However, each time 100 units of a currency are sold its value in relation to the Dollar drops by one Cent. Each time 100 units of a currency are bought its value in relation to the Dollar increases by one Cent. So if in the first season the total of all players' orders results in 500 more Marks being sold than bought then the Mark would have a value of only 95 Cents the following season. If the total of all players' orders results in 1000 more Lira being bought than sold then the Lira would be worth \$1.10 the following season.

4: If only a net 999 units of a currency are bought or sold then the Dollar value only changes by 9 Cents – all fractions are lost.

5: Each player must buy as much as they sell IN RELATION TO DOLLARS. For example on the second turn, using the values quoted at rule 3 above, a player could sell 100 Lira (worth \$110) and then buy 115 Marks (costing \$109.25 – again fractions are LOST). If a player makes an error the GM will simply buy as many units of currency as can be afforded.

6: A player may never sell more than 500 units of any one currency in a single turn. You may however buy as much as you can afford.

7: Each season the GM will list all transactions by each player, holdings in each currency and old value and new value of each currency.

8: If a country is eliminated from the Diplomacy game its currency loses all value and any holdings of that currency are worthless. If a country is not eliminated however its currency can never drop below a value of 1 Cent. The value of a currency has no upper limit.

9: Anyone may join the Bourse at any time and will receive 1000 units of each currency still available.

10: At the end of the Diplomacy game each Bourse players 'credits' will be calculated by multiplying the number of supply centres held by each country by the number of blocks of 100 units of that country's currency held (fractions will be carried). The winner of the Bourse is the player with the greatest 'credits'.

11: Players in the Bourse will usually play under a pseudonym, which allows the players in the Diplomacy game to also take part without giving away any clues as to their future strategy.



Strategy in Bourse

So much for the rules, what about the strategy? Well of course you need to follow the progress of the Diplomacy game very closely. As the fortunes of the seven countries wax and wane you need to be sure to sell a currency of a country that appears to be in decline and buy a currency of a country that is making progress. At the end of the game you want to be out of any country that has been eliminated and to have the most currency units possible of the eventual winner or, in a draw, the countries with the most supply centres. That much is obvious.

But the game can actually be a lot more subtle than that, which is part of its fascination. There is an old quote from dealings in stocks and shares; "Buy at the bottom, sell at the top". The same is true in the Bourse. If you can see a situation where a country is getting

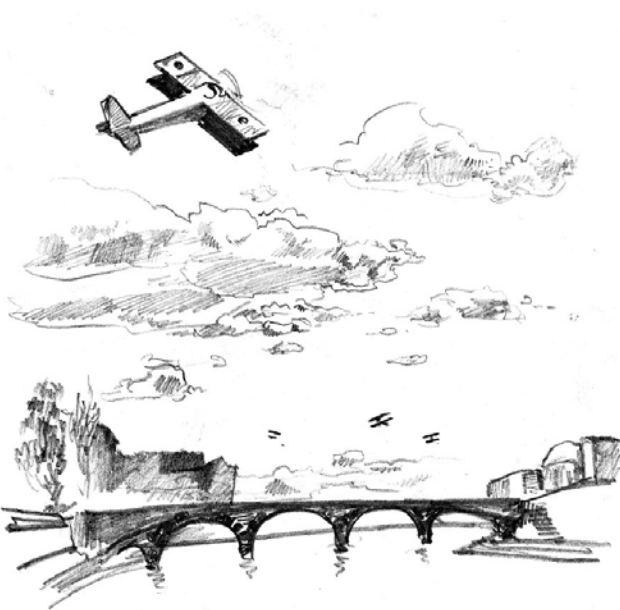
hammered, very low on supply centres and everyone is selling its currency every turn, but you think there is a decent chance that it will eventually survive, it can be worth buying into it. For example if Italy is down to just two supply centres and the Lira has dropped to 40 Cents it will cost you just \$400 to buy 1000 Lira and, if Italy survives, gain 20 credits. If at the same time Germany is the leader on 10 supply centres and the Mark has risen to \$3.00 then to get the same 20 credits you would have to spend \$600 to buy 200 Marks. In a similar way if you see a situation developing where one of the leading countries looks like it's about to get stabbed and go into decline sell the currency and buy into its smaller (and cheaper) enemies. You actually need to do the maths on every turn, but it can be very rewarding.

The thing to remember is that the Bourse winner is the person with the most 'credits' at the end of the game and they are calculated by multiplying supply centres by blocks of currency. Low numbers of supply centres with a low currency value can often bring in more 'credits' than the opposite for the same outlay in Dollars.

[[Later versions of the Bourse rules allow you to buy less than you sell and keep a cash surplus, except on the first turn. And also, with the advent of spreadsheet programs, the bourse I run in Eternal Sunshine uses more decimal points, to 1/100th of a cent. A cash surplus is a good thing to have...until the game ends, at which point is it utterly worthless!]]

Ask the GM

An Advice Column for Diplomacy World



Dear GM:

What are the best Diplomacy Cons?

Signed
Looking for Competition

Dear Competition,

Any con that I am in is usually a good con but since you don't know who I am that doesn't help much. Look for cons that have veteran players since they tend to have

the best competition. Avoid new cons or cons with only "local players"...unless you're looking to win, then go for it.

*Your Pal,
The GM*

Dear GM:

How do you find players?

Signed
Need Opponents

Dear Opponents,

The best way to find players is to go online. Play in at several different sites. If you're looking locally try places where your nerds tend to gather like comic book stores or science fiction conventions. You can also try local gaming clubs—even if they don't play Diplomacy you may find some local Diplomacy players—any place that looks like a good place for an Optometrist to do huge business is probably a good place to find Diplomacy players.

*Your Pal,
The GM*

Got a question for Game Master? Send it to gamemaster "of" diplomacyworld.net and maybe it will appear in a future issue of Diplomacy World!

How Does Germany Win?

By Alfred Nicol

Diplomatic Corp statistics present Germany as the most successful nation with a total of 17 solos from 176 games (a decent sized sample), i.e. nearly ten percent of games. The chart below shows it to be one of the most successful nations.

Country	Solos	Draws	Survivals	Eliminated	Performance*
Austria	9	33	37	97	1.91
England	12	61	37	65	2.97
France	8	45	51	71	2.25
Germany	17	44	34	81	2.89
Italy	6	39	53	77	1.92
Russia	17	45	37	77	2.94
Turkey	7	50	55	64	2.33

*Performance = $(15 \times \text{Solos} + 5 \times \text{Draws} + 1 \times \text{Survivals}) / \text{Games}$

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This is probably why many strategy articles contain a very positive tone about Germany's chances once the initial resolution of the western and eastern triangles is decided. Others cite the opportunity to gain three centers in 01, although not always an advantage, or the ability to frustrate or please Russia in Sweden according to taste and situation that gives Germany the chance to influence both spheres in a way few other nations can. Further evidence for their success can be seen in and Germany and Austria-Hungary's symbiotic relationship, consequently Germany rarely needs to not worry about the south. All these things suggest Germany can survive the early stages and be well placed to be a big part player in the mid to end game.

This is not an article, an argument or polemic, it's a plea for help. Every time I've played diplomacy, Germany always gets walloped, eliminated, stabbed and squashed. I am at a complete loss to see how they can win. I understand Italy's low results although secretly feel that with a good alliance with Russia, should one be forthcoming, and a France occupied in the north, Italy has a good chance. Austria-Hungary, a nation many like to label as the weakest, is in my mind a strong bet, so long as a juggernaut can be dissuaded, and again a good Austria-Hungary/Russia alliance early on against Turkey gives them a great chance of success. But Germany; I just can't see it.

The key issue for Germany is not surviving into the mid game, like Austria-Hungary who can do well if not the victim of a 2:1 early on. For Germany they have every reason to live un-attacked until 04/05. It is surviving the mid game I find so hard to do. Obviously if they face a resolute E/F then they, like any nation early on, will struggle. However Germany usually has no trouble engineering an E/G, or an F/G, against the other hapless member of the western triangle. This soon puts Germany on about six centers. It is then that their

troubles begin.

Firstly they are usually not best placed to get a lion's share of the centers. If France falls, then England is better placed for Iberia than Germany, and Italy will nab Marseilles, leaving Germany with Belgium and Paris. If England falls, then Russia will get Norway, often not always, and France, with a fleet in Brest from the start will probably get the best of England's home centers.



Secondly, once the triangle is resolved, where in all honesty can either England or France go without violating the treaty and stabbing Germany? Germany are physically in the way and much more vulnerable to the stab, either then, or at any time in the game.

Thirdly, once the western triangle is resolved, the chances are that the eastern one will be coming to an end and thus providing Germany's initial ally with the ideal buddy to squash the Germans in the middle of the board.

Put simply, it is the inequitable division of spoils and their central position that makes Germany, in my mind, very difficult to play in the mid game. If I were England or France, I would always accept an alliance with Germany knowing I can deal with them later. The statistics do somewhat back this theory up; Germany has the highest number of eliminations other than Austria-Hungary. However I find it difficult to explain the high solo performance of this nation. If I was playing in a tournament or desired to win, Germany would be my least favorite nation.

So having read my plea, please write to Diplomacy World (diplomacyworld@yahoo.com) with your answers, criticisms, sympathy and even mocking taunts (in letter or article format); Doug will no doubt pass them on. How does Germany win?

Want to help Alfred out? Send me your responses!

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seeing through appearances.”*



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Whither Belgium?

By Joshua Danker-Dake

Let's say you draw Germany. Odds are, your initial discussions with France are going to center around you getting Holland and him getting Belgium. He might even tell you that Belgium is "a traditionally French center."

Why? Because Belgium speaks French, too? That's a laugh. Remember the *Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgiens*. So what tradition might we be talking about? Diplomacy tradition? It certainly doesn't square with history. Germany invaded Belgium in 1914 as part of their World War I Schlieffen Plan. In World War II, Germany rolled virtually unchecked through Belgium into France in 1940. So Belgium is, *traditionally*, Germany's red-carpet gateway to France, and therefore Belgium is a traditionally *German* center (along these lines, one could very well argue that Paris is also a traditionally German center, but I think we'll leave that for another time).



There's usually no good reason even to think about letting France into Belgium. What, are you going to be

allies? That never worked out historically – France and Germany were bitter enemies for centuries – and it doesn't often work out in Diplomacy. England tends to be a better ally for Germany, just as Germany is a better ally for England.

Germany typically opens one of two ways: KIE-HOL, MUN-RUH, BER-KIE or KIE-DEN, MUN-RUH, BER-KIE. Either way, odds are that Germany doesn't get Belgium in 1901. And that's okay. If you do, great, but a six-center Germany is just a target – nobody likes a frontrunner. You don't have to give Belgium to England, either. But at the very least, bounce France.

Germany can mount a supported attack on Belgium in 1901 at the cost of letting Russia into Sweden (France, meanwhile, can only support a 1901 attack on Belgium if he gives up Spain or Portugal for the year). But this isn't what we usually see. More often, Germany moves to Denmark in the Spring so that he can bounce Russia in the fall, leaving him with only one unit he can bring against Belgium.

Yes, the bullheaded repeat order of DEN-SWE has a good chance of keeping Russia from encroaching too greatly too early, but bouncing Russia in Sweden typically has less to do with antagonism or hostility and more to do with the fact that it's easy, and that you just might get into Sweden down the road if Russia gets in trouble in the south. But always remember that Belgium is just as deserving of Germany's full attention as Sweden is, and often more so.

In a more diplomatic vein, Germany might consider supporting his ally England into Belgium as a sign of good faith and as a loaner property of sorts. If he's got Holland and Denmark, Germany doesn't *need* Belgium right away, and he still has enough resources to push a land campaign into France or a naval campaign into Scandinavia.

So for Germany, which is the right move? Obviously, it depends on negotiations. But the point is this: by right, Germany, the *Königreich Belgien* belongs to *you*, and you should think very carefully about what you do with it.

Einigkeit macht stark.

Joshua is the Diplomacy World Strategy and Tactics Editor.

A False Prophet in the Temple

By ~~Jon Hill~~ Somebody Other Than Jon Hill

February featured the first Diplomacy tournament of 2010, TempleCon in Providence, RI. I had my eye on going to this tournament as I am a New England resident, and it would have been easy for me to attend. I am but a humble Diplomacy follower; I played some back in college with some friends, and I occasionally have a house game now. This would have been my first tournament, but unfortunately I was summoned to participate in my town's DnD association's LARP festival. Mmmmm...potato chips and Mountain Dew.

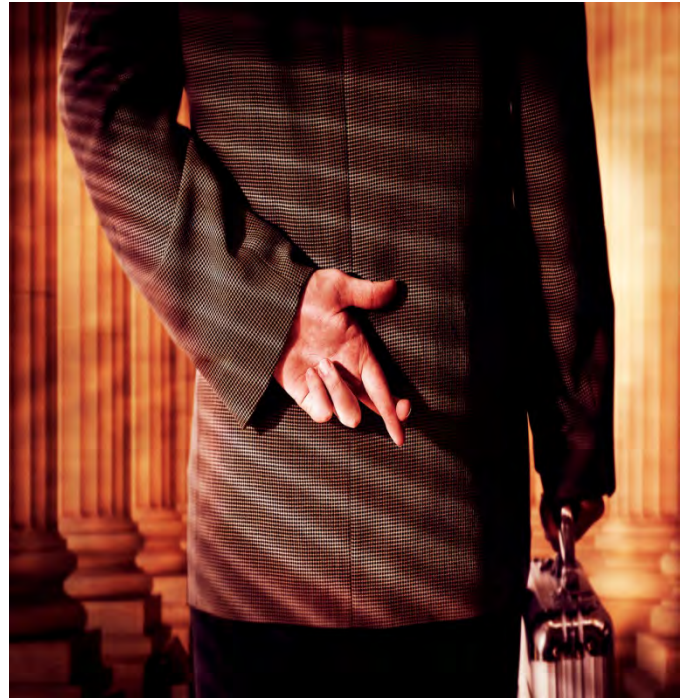
Even though I have never attended a tournament before, I keep track of the players on the interwebs as it interests me a great deal, and because I have no life. So it struck me odd when I noticed that there was some controversy regarding the tournament at TempleCon. Again - I didn't go, but I felt a need to write this article to express how I feel regarding what I've read thus far. The remarks about a certain Adam Sigal, whom I've ironically never heard of, taking the win away from Jon Hill disturb me a great deal.

This player, Adam Sigal, thinks he can show up at a tournament, and steal the victory away from the rightful owner by stealing his name tag? Is that really what happened? What kind of scoring system rewards cheating of this sort?

And to think this would happen to Jon Hill? I've been following him for awhile; he's put forth many great initiatives helping to promote New England tournaments. He's pushed doing drop dead, and also working really hard trying to help Carnage move into center stage for 2011! And he's starting to organize house games at Pandemonium on a regular basis. I hope to attend these!

My point being, who is this false player... this false prophet... who stole the victory away from Jon Hill? As I have looked over the final results, this Adam Sigal took the place of Jon Hill's Turkey. Melissa Call played Russia right next to him. I've watched Melissa for a bit now, and I also know she's moving to Australia next year, so she has no vested interest in this at all. I'm betting this Adam fellow paid Melissa off!

Next I see that Carl Ellis played Austria. This is a pure give-away that this game was Jon Hill's. Carl and Jon Hill get along so well! In fact, they get along so well that Carl does whatever Jon Hill tells him to do. And as we know there is no way for Turkey to solo unless Turkey sits for three years, from '02-'05, while watching Austria take all his armies and move on Munich and Berlin.



Finally, the Tournament Director played France...it's obvious some hanky-panky went down in Mars and Iberia for the final dots.

I think there are really only two courses of action to take in order to keep the balance in the Diplomacy world and Grand Prix standings: either TempleCon should be stripped of its Grand Prix status, or the points should be rightfully given to Jon Hill.

After all - he is the official winner!

Jon Hill is a newcomer to Diplomacy World, but has been a very positive influence in the New England face-to-face Diplomacy hobby for some time now. ← Ignore that. This article was not written by Jon Hill. It was written by somebody else entirely. It could have been anyone...anyone, that is, but Jon Hill. It just wasn't Jon Hill. Got it? So put that out of your mind. Forget it was ever suggested. Look at this pocket watch, going back and forth. You are getting sleepy...sleepy...remember, you don't know who wrote this article. You only know it wasn't anyone by the name of Jon Hill. Now...when I count backwards from three, you will think you are a chicken. Ready? Three.... Two.... One...

Why I Hate Economic Variants!

By Jim Burgess

I am the Interview Editor here at *Diplomacy World*, and I've done a lot of interviews here over the years (by the way, I need some inspiration to get back on track doing them again, so if you would like to be interviewed, please ask me!!!). Back in *DW* #85, I interviewed Edi Birsan and Edi said something that he said his father told him that really resonates with me and has stuck with me more than any interview quote over the years: "concentrate your vices". Most of us who are really deeply engaged in the Diplomacy hobby are doing just that and perhaps my story in deeply disliking economic variants is really just my story, but I think my biggest problem with them is that they dilute my vices in being completely and totally hooked by the Diplomacy hobby. And the reason that it might be just my story is that I have a Ph.D. in Economics and most of the rest of you are not quite so engaged in economic theory and thinking. Of course, there is a strong and deep history of economists (just as there is for lawyers) getting hooked on Diplomacy. Among my fellow economists, it is somewhat known that I am the expert on the game of Diplomacy. On at least half a dozen times in my life, at some economics meeting or another, some other fellow economist has walked up to me and said something about Diplomacy out of the blue. And the game theory, statistical concepts, and balance/equilibrium thinking that are at the heart of economics are also at the heart of the theory of the game of Diplomacy, at least in my view. So, economics already is right there in Diplomacy, so why can't you make a good thing better by introducing more economics into it? Well, put simply they are all dilutions and perversions of the fine well-expressed economic concepts that already are there. I'm going to start by discussing rule variants that are economic variants, and then at the end talk about the special case of Bourse games that attach currencies to each country and establish a separate side game to form a market for these currencies and the games that combine those Bourses with the main game itself.

I am not going to be comprehensive in covering all of the economic variants out there and in particular, the heyday of economic variants in the hobby was in the Golden Age around 1970, which was when I was still in junior high school. I was playing Diplomacy then, to be sure, but my Ph.D. in economics was way in the future, and this was before I found the larger hobby. In those early days, the indefatigable Don Miller (who was one of the originators of the idea of variants) was the first innovator and proponent of economic variants. At that time, the Science Fiction and Diplomacy hobbies were very closely related and the SF writer Jerry Pournelle wrote two separate versions of economic variants. This particular push to add complexities to the Diplomacy game, inspired by Don Miller's innovative mind, reached

its *reductio ad absurdum* in the immensely bloated Hypereconomic Diplomacy series of variants that had up to 50 players, many different types of units (even fishing boats), and a nearly impossible complexity for the GM. These games were seldom if ever even finished and were most common/popular in the UK. Geoff Challenger became Miller's partner in crime, both in designing and running Hypereconomic Diplomacy games, but I don't believe they ever finished one (the history there is somewhat vague, and since Doug loves to get letters that he never gets, if anyone knows more on this phase of the hobby, write us a letter).

But the basic idea was: "hey, you have these things called supply centers, and each supply center supports one unit, but what if you had a more flexible income and spending system?" And my central question is "Why?" The essential issue in Diplomacy is Diplomacy and the idea that this is a multi-player non-commitment game. The economics and game theory in the theory of the game (proof left to the reader) is that the basic nature of the game as having seven players, an odd number and enough to create some opportunities for localized alliances, but not so large that every player can afford to ignore negotiations (under ideal positions) with any other power in any season. This already incorporates economic ideas of support and competition and balance/equilibrium. So we have income and some of the income in many of these variants can be saved for later. In the standard game, we have waived builds (a tactical strategy that is far too little employed for some reason or another), but you don't gain any "saved up" value from this that these savings games can engender. OK, so we may get more "waived builds". Is this such a big deal? Well, if we like balance of power, anything that allows the game leader to build up crushing power can actually take us away from good BoP play. This is not a major objection, but I think it could be decisive in some cases pushing solos and dominance play. The next major design feature is that you can vary the "price" of units, perhaps having some units that are cheaper to buy and other more powerful ones being more expensive. But these prices (see our exception with Tom Swider's variant below) usually are regulated by the variant designer, which makes them inherently uninteresting economically, can again mainly act just to unbalance the game by having powerful units that only the more powerful players can purchase, and can be confusing for players and GM alike. The third major design feature which really frosts me is the opportunities for bribes of other players (paying them to ally with you), loans, and other ways of perhaps buying commitment. All of these basically can be employed as ways external to the person to person negotiated trust to buy or commit trust. These commitments again dilute the game, they don't

improve it.

After the mainly British experiments with economic variants died out, they were created anew in the 1980's in the US. Fred Davis came up with a set of rules (dubbed in the Variant Bank as Economic Diplomacy IV - re03 – which you can find by following the link <http://www.variantbank.org/results/rules/e/economic4.htm>) that also had a map variant attached to it (in that vein of variants where Fred tried to improve the basic map). Like most of Fred's "improvements" I don't really see why it is so important in this variant. Primarily, Fred splits the two coast provinces like Spain and St. Petersburg into two provinces, Ireland is a province, and splits Trieste in half so that Austria and Italy don't have adjacent home supply centers. Fred also adds another idea, which is present in some other economic variants, where every single province has a numerical value for ownership, not just supply centers. This is an interesting idea, but the seas have no value which adds imbalance (partly why he adds places like Persia and Ireland to give some home ownership of value to the powers with many seas). This variant says "fleets are more expensive than armies", but since seas have no value, the logic of this escapes me. And it has the lending/borrowing/bribing rules that to me create distorting and diluting incentives to ensure commitments.

The next major effort, again in the US hobby, was the series of efforts made by Larry Cronin over many years, although he had a couple of names, most of them were called Perestroika, and I will comment on Perestroika V which is the version available in the Variant Bank (<http://www.variantbank.org/results/rules/p/perestroika.htm>). Perestroika has another rule change that annoys us economist types, it has "inflation" where the cost of armies and fleets increases by a fixed amount year to year. This increase doesn't depend on the monetary policy of the countries or powers, it just happens to everyone. It is completely unclear to me how this adds to the power of THE GAME. It has the loans/trading rules that allow unnatural commitment. Trading also happens at fixed prices, but you "have to trade" to be able to maintain your power since traded points get doubled. While this is supposed to document the "gains from trade", again this doesn't change with government policies, it just "is". Neutrals also have "treasuries" which can be traded with, and stolen when you conquer other countries. The effect of these sorts of rules is to reward patience and alliance and building up resources before attacking. This may be judged by some to be realistic; however, I don't think Diplomacy has anything to do with being realistic. It is a great game because it is a psychological and trust game of seven players who can never be sure how and when to trust other players, since anyone can say anything and do something else. But we all are social creatures and we like to avoid conflict and seek comfort. So if given an opportunity to dial down the intensity of the game, we tend to take it. This is a caution from me to all variant designers, you don't

want to do anything that ever makes it easier for powers to ally and to stay allied. This is the antithesis of the BoP that makes the game interesting and exciting.

Finally, the other approach to adding economics to Diplomacy games are the various Bourse rules. The Bourse rules vary a bit; however, they all share the basic idea that there is a currency for each power on the board, players in the Bourse are observers (or sometimes also players in the underlying Diplomacy game) and they buy and sell the currencies of the powers and in the end the outcome of the game determines what the final value of the currencies is and who wins the Bourse. As a basic "prediction game" to predict the outcome of the game, this is a harmless way of engaging observers in the game. Allowing the players in the underlying Diplomacy game to play in the Bourse is generally a mistake. If Diplomacy players take positions in the Bourse, this may inhibit them from making stabs that they otherwise should and would make. Otherwise, Bourse itself is relatively harmless. Yet, players can still get engaged in what is happening in the Bourse and make decisions in the game intended to annoy the players in the Bourse. I fully admit to doing this in the famous hobby Bourse game of the late 1990's played on the Judges. We organized a high profile Bourse game there, and Dave Kleiman and I engineered a two way 17-17 draw, when Dave Kleiman for sure (and maybe me) could have soloed and the players in the Bourse were left holding the bag. This resulted in a host of rec.games.diplomacy discussion that you can Google if you want to. Distorting, distorting and diluting: why ruin such a good game as Diplomacy with variants such as these?? Tom Swider, among others, have tried to meld the Bourse ideas directly into the game itself. Of all the ideas discussed in this article, this is at least intriguing to me. But not surprisingly, Tom reports that he's not sure if anyone ever completed a game of his variant, called Plutonomy. But there was (not surprisingly) more interest in the UK, where as I previously noted economic variants always have been more popular than in the US. In Plutonomy, the Bourse starts out differently than the usual game (where everyone usually gets 1000 units of each currency – starting evenly and identically) so every player can decide how to allocate their 8000 units (also a numeraire base currency of dollars is established). And there are no PLAYERS in the usual sense. The Bourse players bid for control of the powers in the game with their currency units. I still think that this is surely distorting and diluting, so much so that the main powers aren't owned by anyone directly at all. But it doesn't pass the simplicity test, where this actually plays out is going to be very complicated and the game at the beginning of "currency allocation" means that games can play out very differently based on how this allocation is made. If one player happens to place most of their currency in two powers, that no one else has, they could gain so much so quickly, the prices of those currencies could rise so fast, that if they were played jointly for a few turns

the outcome of the game would be determined.

But in the end, not enough economic variant games in the era of my hobby awareness (since the mid-1970s) ever have been played or completed, so it is difficult to argue from evidence (and I've not bothered to do enough research to see what actually happened) and the games of the early 1970's in the British hobby are outside of my source capability. But the challenge for all variants is doubly or triply a concern here in the economic variant world. What are you actually doing or

accomplishing that makes the game better? The siren call of "realism" just doesn't cut it in the virtual reality of the game. I'm probably just a curmudgeon, but I complained that I didn't like this focus since economic variants were basically useless. Instead, I probably have the longest article on that topic in the szine and I'm basically telling all of you to forget about economic variants. Yet, it's a free universe; do what you want and let the market rule. You vote with your feet against the economic variants and that's the evidence.

Risky Diplomacy

By Zachary Jarvie

This article was originally written as a forward to a Book Review of Total Diplomacy: The Art of Winning RISK by Ehsan Honary which appears elsewhere in this issue. It was suggested by Jim Burgess and Douglas Kent that I had actually written two articles in one, and that I should split them up and expand on each. I am not sure if they really wanted to know more of what I had to say, or of they just wanted me to fill up more space in their zine! Either way, thanks to both of them for their ideas and the very constructive input.

When I was a young(er) boy I was a member of the Boy Scouts of America. Our favorite activity was camping but playing RISK was a close second. Regardless if it was an all night church-lock-in or a 4 week long summer camp, rain or shine, day or night, you can bet there was a RISK board and if the game could not be finished in one sitting then the positions would be recorded and the game would be picked up at a more convenient time. I don't know about your RISK games but we stressed alliances, nonaggression pacts, and other negotiated deals. A major backstabbing or betrayal happened at least once a game. If you needed privacy and time to hammer out an alliance or plan of attack you left the board and designated a sit in to make all your defensive roles. Of course you never left your cards at the table and you had better be sure that someone there would object to tampering with your position because if you left nothing but enemies at the table your cards would be known and 2 or 3 armies that you were not likely to miss could be discreetly assassinated. We were a bunch of snot nosed little brats after all! At the time I was unaware of the game Diplomacy and suspect none of my friends knew of it as well.

It was years later (graduate school) when I discovered the game of Diplomacy. I was tooling around on the internet reading about various strategy games (and ignoring my thesis). It was then that I found out about this estranged, younger, twin brother to one of my childhood favorites, the game of RISK. Before I get tarred and feathered by the many diplomats I just outraged, I must explain that I mean "twin" in the non-identical

sense. However I do not retract the comparison. Despite being conceived by different men on different continents, they are both games of conquest, each excellent in its own way, and has multiple variants both in terms of maps and rules. Each was developed in the 1950's. Diplomacy was of course "conceived" in 1954 but because it did not have its "birth"/release until 1959, I think I can get away with referring to RISK as the elder brother as it was released in 1957.

In a strictly commercial sense, RISK is the much more successful of the two, by far. The reasons for this are clear. RISK has comfortably familiar game mechanics. Each player has his or her very own turn and to simulate combat the game uses dice! Diplomacy on the other hand shuns the idea of random factors in "combat" and resolves military conflict with a logical and simple set of rules that have enough exceptions and special cases to actually make them appear quite complicated to the first time player. The simultaneous implementation of the orders in Diplomacy can be accurately described as elegant, but it requires from the players a little more coordination and discipline in terms of making deadlines. In risk there are no deadlines and a player can be given some latitude as to how long it takes them to complete their own turn. Also, despite having some variant rules (and maps) that employ less than 7 people, Diplomacy is really not meant to be so played. It is a 7 player game despite that fact that occasionally Italy is left leaderless when a 7th can't be found. On the other hand RISK is designed for 3 to 6 players. This lower and more flexible number of required players makes RISK a much easier game to organize, at least in terms of playing face to face.¹

¹ As a Side note, I believe that the optimal number of players for a game of RISK is 5. Fewer than this number limits a players diplomatic and strategic options. Also as many who have designed good variants of Diplomacy might point out, an odd number of players are preferable to an even number. An even number of players can to easily split into early fixed alliances that no one is willing to betray knowing the other alliance won't falter. In my opinion, because of the turn based

Estranged is the correct term to describe relationship between the brothers. Many avid RISK players both children and adults do not even know the game of Diplomacy exists!!! That was certainly the case for my childhood. Diplomacy players on the other hand are very familiar with RISK. So what do they think of the game?

Without asking a large group of them to weigh in on the subject I would like to make conjecture.

I can imagine some Diplomacy players regarding RISK as a fun game but one of far less importance than their beloved Diplomacy. However I can imagine a great many Diplomacy players thinking of RISK condescendingly as some sort of Children's variant of Diplomacy much like how checkers /droughts used to be called women's chess. Does this sound like your thinking?²

The best way I can think of to examine what Diplomacy players think of RISK is to examine what Diplomacy players like about Diplomacy. . Diplomacy players like the focus on player negotiations and the simultaneous orders players issue in the game. They also like the perceived absence of "chance" at least in the form of a random game component such as dice

What about the focus on negotiations?

This is where I relay think diplomacy players should like RISK, especially if they are playing a game of RISK with other Diplomacy players. RISK, at its best, is a game of Diplomacy. The same concepts of negotiation, agreements, alliances, and betrayals all are used to equal effect in RISK as in Diplomacy. The dice merely adds a random element you must prepare for and accommodate into your plans.

How might Diplomacy players view the individual turns in RISK?

The simultaneous moves players make in Diplomacy is one of the most unique features of the game. Risk on the other hand uses the system of most games in that each player takes a turn. I think a discussion of the differences between simultaneous vs. individual turns is

the mechanics of RISK it is much less prone to stalemates between teams than Diplomacy and its variants. Still I maintain that because of the odd-man-out or kingmaker factor, 5 players are better than 4 or 6 when playing RISK.

² As this is an article is written by a Diplomacy Player for the Diplomacy community I should state that in the eyes of the community any person who likes the game of RISK more than the game of Diplomacy is not, for purposes of this discussion, considered to be "a Diplomacy player". Such a person is classified as a RISK player who dabbles in the game of Diplomacy.

really a discussion of how diplomacy and negotiations are carried out in each game. For one, there is no diplomacy phase in the game of RISK. Negotiations are supposed to be ongoing throughout the game. You should be talking to the other players before, during and after your turn. Also, In RISK there is no official time limit to the length of a turns. This means that a player who feels he needs more time for his deal making can stretch out his turn until he gets the desired diplomatic affect. The result (absent any type of house rule placing a time limit on turns) is a type of in game filibuster! The opposite is also possible in that bullying and peer pressure can result in players rushing through their turn and possibly making hasty and poor decisions in order to satisfy their impatient fellow players.

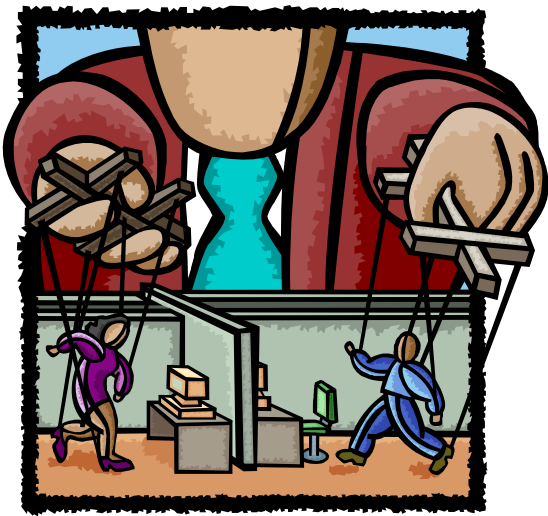
The separate turns in RISK can have an effect on the way trust is established and alliances are maintained. In Diplomacy player come to an agreement and simultaneously reveal if they held to it if they when back on their word. In RISK somebody always has to go first! Drawing down your troops on a new ally's border can be a powerful show of trust. Then again now that he can see just how vulnerable it makes you he just may think better on following through on his pledge to pull his troupes off the border. Make no mistake Diplomacy has lots of examples in which one player can be the one to "make the first gesture" in dealing with his enemies. But in RISK its part of the game mechanics.

I would even go so far as to suggest that the game of RISK can be viewed as having Spring and Fall seasons. Each player gets his own Spring offensive. The difference is your Spring is not your opponents Spring. Then each player gets a very long Fall (containing all the other players' collective Spring offensives). During your Fall season you must deal with the consequences of your actions or inactions during your Spring. At the end of your Fall season you get Winter builds based on your territorial holdings. If you lose territory you still get winter builds, all be it fewer of them than you would have had you not lost territory. At least you don't have to make Winter disbands, but If you lost territory you lost troops in those battles as well.

So what might Diplomacy players think of a game that has dice?

Everyone who has played at least 2 games of RISK has had a variation of the following situation happen to them. You and another player have a common border each with 5 armies in your border territory. Your turn comes along and regardless of any agreements you may or may not have had; you turn in a set of cards for 20 armies and make the brilliant tactical decision to place them all on that border! You then launch your attack and you take out the opponents 5 armies. The only problem is that you rolled so poorly compared to the defender that you only have 4 armies left! The three that you move into the newly acquired territory is not nearly

enough to continue the long string of conquests deep into the enemy's territory that you had initially planned. Your opponent's turn comes along and he turns in a set of cards for 25 armies, and for some reason the dice continue to favor him. As a result you lose well over half of your territories and are now a dead carcass for the other players to swoop in on! You don't blame your plan. You blame the dice, ignoring the fact that they are inanimate objects! A Future Diplomacy player, which does not yet know of Diplomacy's very existence will bemoan his bad luck, he will shake his fist at cruel Heaven and blame it for blunting the natural fruit of his own tactical brilliance and the logical soundness of his strategy. When he finally learns of Diplomacy, he will point to the random results produced by the dice as indisputable evidence of the flawed nature of RISK. He will forever hold Diplomacy to be, by far, the better of the two games. That fact that as Diplomacy players we all know the person is correct in their assertion of Diplomacy's superiority is, in my opinion, no excuse for belittling the Game of RISK. Chance exists in Diplomacy. How often have you been faced with a situation in which you can strike at one of two adjacent enemy supply centers defended by a single unit? The chances of a bounce or a new SC are 50/50. I have even heard some players admit to flipping a coin so that their opponent cannot possibly out think them! The Difference in Risk is Chance is simply more visible an integrated part of the game mechanics.



Diplomacy players must remember that while the RISK dice may produce random results, those results are not unpredictable. Determining the probability of a role of dice in RISK is not too difficult to calculate. And if you (like me) still have difficulty with calculating probabilities the internet has made it ever so easy to look up someone else's calculations. This all means that the results of any battle in the game of RISK can be predicted, albeit imperfectly. This can tell us how many armies we should need to make a successful attack or to adequately defend any given territory. Adding a few

extra to the optimal number of necessary units takes into account the remaining random element of the game. This brings me to another aspect of RISK, micromanagement.

It's hard to say RISK involves micromanagement. It has only 2 (really 3) commodities or resources. Those are cards and territories which can be sub grouped into continents and gross territories. And the game of RISK really only offers one thing to purchase: armies. But compared to Diplomacy RISK gives the thorough accountant a real chance to run the table against less detail oriented players!

The micromanagement comes in though the proper maintaining of one's resources and the proper placement of armies. That's why understanding the probabilities of the dice is important to success. Knowing exactly how many armies you should need to defend a given border allows you first to make sure you do not under defend and then do not over defend so that you can use the excess at other positions. Most players don't whip out the calculator. I myself relied by my intuitive feeling to determine what was an appropriate placement of my forces was. Unfortunately my friend's intuition was usually far more accurate than my own. . . . I should have done some math! Diplomacy requires a less material micromanagement. Sure enough you have to manage your statements, promises and all around diplomacy. But there is only one resource in Diplomacy, centers. There are of course two possible expenditures of that resource. The choice between building a an army or a fleet can be a critical but in no way more critical I think than the initial placement of RISK armies which can be placed in any of the players territories (instead of a limited number of home centers) and once placed have restricted movement. In the standard Rules for RISK the ability to move units from one territory to another (without engaging in combat) is very limited. This makes initial allocation of resources a crucial factor in RISK. The standard rule for "fortifying one position" is so restrictive that many games are played with alternate rules that allow more fluidity in troop movements.

I am not suggesting anyone ditch Diplomacy and start a charismatic tent revival of RISK. But I hope I have made enough good arguments (along with my many poor ones) to help limit any future RISK bashing that some Diplomacy players will always be prone to engage in. And perhaps, if I ever manage to make it to a Diplomacy tournament, some of you who have read this might be willing to join me in an afterhours game of RISK. If you were knocked out early in the first round elimination, invite those that killed you to join the game and get your revenge by beating them at Risk or at least causing the fellow that stabbed you to stay up so late rolling the dice that he has to report to the finals table the next day in half conscious stupor.

Houston Diplomacy Update

By Conrad Woodring



At OwlCon in Houston this year (Feb 20-21, 2010) we had what I consider to be a successful turnout. For the only scheduled round of the Diplomacy event we had more than a full board show up, so game master Jeff Johannigman graciously stepped out as did another player. We had four first time Dippers, all of whom enjoyed the game and wanted to play again. The game lasted 12 moves.



As importantly as playing and teaching the game, we (the Houston Diplomacy Group) were able to make several new contacts of fragmented groups of players around the city. We struggled in the fall to find a suitable weekend to play, and then often could not get enough players. With these new contacts, things are looking promising for face-to-face play in Houston.



On the second day of the convention I posted a sign advertising a pickup game of Diplomacy. We had 10 people show up, and therefore had to turn some away. Roland Cooke and I both offered to sit out and help new players. Two of the players from the first day came back to play, as did three first time players. We set up our board in the courtyard (pictured) and played outside 10 moves before it was too dark to properly see the board.



Since our games at OwlCon in Houston, we have seen a sudden jump in interest. Friend's Susie and Chris said that Diplomacy was the highlight of their OwlCon and they were immediately eager for me. In an effort to have our burgeoning group participate in the NADF's March Madness, we successfully organized two games in March, during which 4 new players learned the game. I hosted one game in my apartment outside of Houston in Beaumont, Texas. The other game was hosted by Susie, whom, along with Chris, had done quite a bit of research and preparation between OwlCon and our game in Houston. They had read articles, strategy pieces, opening movie suggestions, etc. They had even tracked

down Steve Cooley's article from last Diplomacy World about being a loser. I am very hopefully for these two as they both show a knack for games and have expressed interest in holding monthly games!

So far we have made an effort to stick to very short time limits as has been successful in Chicago. In the words of a great face-to-face diplomacy player, we "play fast, not well." In doing that though, you get better faster.

Perhaps my favorite part of spreading Diplomacy in Texas over the past few months has been the experience of playing with my friend Jessica. Jessica

finds the game so intense that it makes her adrenaline rush, which, by some strange body chemistry, makes her nearly faint at intense moments in the game.

Conrad has been instrumental in building and developing a more cohesive Houston-area Diplomacy hobby. With luck we can continue to see the local club grow and flourish, perhaps to the point of hosting its own Diplomacy-only event on a larger scale sometimes in the future! Attempts to build similar clubs in Dallas, Austin, and other parts of Texas are now underway.

Selected Upcoming Conventions

Find Conventions All Over the World at <http://diplom.org/Face/cons/index.php>

Chill Out Con IV - Friday April 16th - Sunday April 18th - Hanover, Germany - <http://www.diplomacy-bund.de>

DipCon 43 / Whipping 7 - Friday April 16th - Sunday April 18th - San Francisco, California - <http://www.bayareadiplomacy.org/dipcon.php>

Brighton DipCon I - Friday May 7th - Sunday May 9th - Brighton, Sussex., United Kingdom - <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/ukf2fdip/>

ManorCon XXVIII - Friday July 16th - Monday July 19th - Leicester University, United Kingdom - <http://www.manorcon.org.uk>

WACcon hosts The European Diplomacy Championships - Thursday August 26th - Sunday August 29th - Paris, France - <http://diplom.org/~seattle>

Buckeye Game Fest XI - Thursday September 30th - Sunday October 3rd - Columbus, Ohio - <http://buckeyeboardgamers.org/buckeyegamefest.htm>

Italian EGP Step, Milan 2010 - Saturday October 30th - 2010 - Sunday October 31st - Milano, Italy - http://diplomacy.cleosolutions.com/component/option,com_attend_events/Itemid,29/

Carnage Accords IX - Friday November 5th - Sunday November 7th - Fairlee, Vermont - <http://www.nedip.org/tournaments/carnage-accords/>

HessenCon 2010 / German National Diplomacy Championship - Friday November 19th - Sunday November 21st - Waldkappel, Germany - <http://www.diplomacy-bund.de>



Diplomacy World Demo Game – *Known World* Variant – (Also Known As “DC229”)

The Current Players:

Arabia - Matt Kremer,
Byzantium - Gregory Alexopoulos.
China - Lynn Mercer.
Denmark - Former Trout (aka Sanford O'Donnell).
Egypt - Ian Moes.
France - Nigel Phillips or Nigs as he likes to be known.
Germany – Russ Manning, the replacement Germany.
India - Andy Jameson or the White Wolf.
Khazaria - the game designer, David Cohen.
Russia - Darren Sharma.
Spain - Nathan Deily.
The Samanids - played by John Reside,

Srivijaya - played by Mike Morris.
Wagadu - Mikael Johansson,
Axum - Benjamin Hester.

The GM:

Nick Higgins (Verdanda Italics)

The Commentators:

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Spring and Summer 908 Results

The Spring 908 season has been adjudicated. Looking across the map, there is a lot of "mopping up" going on, with the holdout Russian, Samanid, and Umayyid dots falling one-by-one to their conquerors. One area with new developments is Africa, with Wagadu fighting back in West Africa, a Sri Vijayan fleet landing in the Axumite SC of Zimbabwe, and a Byzantine fleet landing in the West Frankish SC of Ifriqiya (the first direct French-Byzantine contact to date).

We have one set of press before the adjudication:

[illegible]

Spring Adjudication

Arabian A Ali - Urg *Bounce*
 Arabian A Bal S A Srk - Ati
 Arabian A Buk S A Ali - Urg *Cut*
 Arabian A Ghu - Kyk *Bounce*
 Arabian A Her - Blk
 Arabian A Ind S A Knj
 Arabian A Jer - Dam
 Arabian A Kas S A Her - Blk *Cut*
 Arabian A Kho - Isf
 Arabian A Kip - Bas *Bounce*
 Arabian A Knj H
 Arabian A Man S A Ujj
 Arabian A Sev - Mrd *Bounce*
 Arabian A Sha S A Kas
 Arabian A Srk - Ati
 Arabian A Tam - Srk
 Arabian A Ujj S A Knj
 Arabian F Ars S A Ujj
 Arabian F Oma S F Ars

Axum A Ale S A Daj - Zaw
Axum A Daj - Zaw
Axum A Jej S A Kan - Jel
Axum A Kan - Jel
Axum A Mak - Dai

Axum A Nio - Awd
Axum A Roh - Lub
Axum A Sud S A Kan - Jel
Axum F Adu - Srs
Axum F Gad S F Zim - Mes
Axum F Soc S F Gad
Axum F Yem S F Gad
Axum F Zim - Mes

Byzantine A Con S A Dal - Mac
Byzantine A Dal - Mac
Byzantine A Spo - Dal
Byzantine A Thr - Ono *Bounce*
Byzantine A Vla S A Smo - Kie
Byzantine F Epi S A Spo - Dal
Byzantine F IIs C A Spo - Dal
Byzantine F Ios S F Tys
Byzantine F Lis - Ifr

Chinese A Cha - Uyg
Chinese A Kai - Cha
Chinese A Khi S A Kyr - Orb
Chinese A Kyr - Orb
Chinese A Tib S A Cha - Uyg
Chinese F Yes H

Danish A Bja - Kom
Danish A Che S A Kar - Ros
Danish A Est - Nov
Danish A Liv S A Maz - Smo
Danish F Fis S A Est - Nov
Danish F Jln - Ngs
Danish F Ngs - Ics
Danish F Whs - Bja

French A Gra H
French A Kar - Ros
French A Kut - Tah
French A Lbu - Lom
French A Lot - Swa
French A Rom H
French A Sla S A Dal
French A Val H
French A Yug - Kip *Bounce*
French F Bls - Sar
French F Brc - Nos
French F Ifr - Tys
French F Lgs S F Ifr - Tys
French F Sjt S F Bls - Sar
French F Swo - Sta

German A Agu S A Rom

German A Kie S A Pol - Vol *Cut*
 Dislodged
 German A Mac H *Dislodged*
 Disbanded
 German A Maz - Smo
 German A Ono S A Mac *Cut*
 German A Pol - Vol
 German A Vis S A Ono

Indian A Var - Knj *Bounce*

Russian A Nov - Smo *Bounce*
 Dislodged
 Russian A Pec S A Smo - Kie
 Russian A Ros - Kri
 Russian A Smo - Kie

Samanid A Ati H *Dislodged*
 Samanid A Bas S A Ati *Cut*
 Samanid A Kyk - Urg *Bounce*
 Samanid A Mrd S A Ati *Cut*

Samanid A Sam - Buk *Bounce*
 Samanid A Sog - Kas *Bounce*
 Samanid A Vya - Sev *Bounce*

Spanish F Crs S F Tys - Bls
 Spanish F Sar S F Tys - Bls *Cut*
 Dislodged *Disbanded*
 Spanish F Tys - Bls

Srivijayan A Jam - Chl
 Srivijayan A Ras S A Jam - Chl
 Srivijayan F Cho S A Jam - Chl
 Srivijayan F Cob C A Jam - Chl
 Srivijayan F Gos - Zim
 Srivijayan F Mah S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Mas S A Ras
 Srivijayan F Mis - Sus
 Srivijayan F Sus - Gos

Wagadu A Aga - Jel *Bounce*
 Wagadu A San - Kus

Wagadu A Tah - Kan
 Wagadu A Wal S A San - Kus
 Wagadu F Sos S A Aga - Jel
 Wagadu F Wts - Tas

Retreat Possibilities

German A Kie can retreat to Maz or disband
 German A Mac is destroyed (no valid retreats)
 Russian A Nov can retreat to Kar or disband
 Samanid A Ati can retreat to Udm or disband
 Spanish F Sar is destroyed (no valid retreats)

Retreat Adjudications

German A Kie retreats to Maz
 Russian A Nov retreats to Kar
 Samanid A Ati retreats to Udm

Spring and Summer 908 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Denmark takes one of the two northernmost Russian centers, helps France into the other one, and helps Germany into Smolensk. These three centers can be held this year, whatever Russia does, thus leaving Russia completely crippled with the remaining Russian centers further south. Only an unlikely assistance from Samanid can save Russia. The Danish fleets are replacing the French ones in the west, which makes Denmark much more difficult to stab. Next year, Denmark will probably be free for other adventures, either against Samanid or against his German ally.

The way they attacked the northernmost Russian centers was the way to do it, yes, they lost a bit of ground in the south, but not in any way that stops the continuation moving south once the Russian units are gone next game year. The Samanid assist is unlikely as Suzanne notes, but I am not impressed with John R.'s communication since the Arabian stab. I think there was an opportunity here, not necessarily working with the Danish, but working effectively with someone. I do not think the Samanid are going to survive for long unless they work up something with one of their neighbors and the Danish are one possibility. I think it is very likely that they attack the Samanid next. I do think the Germans are the ones who are at risk, but I do not believe they stop, the FGD alliance keeps charging east.

I think the Germans are already being ditched.

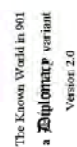
He will probably only gain the Russian center that he Nov, but he hasn't been in such a good position for years. However, if a stab of Germany is programmed for this fall, he isn't at all in position to gain anything from it this year. He could probably gain Bulgar this year, if he wanted to go that way.

I agree, that's why I think the FGD alliance continues its efficient and communicative advance.

Um, OK....but...

France is once again in position to stab Germany badly this fall, while assuring support for Rome. He made a strange support of Byzantium in Dalmatia, which Byzantium ignored (or took advantage of to better his position against Germany. Is France going to replace his German ally with Byzantium, hoping that the latter will break entirely with Russia? That looks possible.

True, and certainly it is possible, but we would think he would do it working with Denmark and there is no evidence Denmark is thinking that way. I agree there is the small amount of evidence of working with Byzantium. There surely is no gain for Gregory in sticking with the dying Russian. So, this is possible. I also see some possibility that an everybody in five way with adding Byzantium to the western juggernaut is possible, or at least that Nigs is pushing this.

[illegible]

We would think Nigs would alert Denmark if he were going to stab Germany? I think he might prefer doing it on his. There's always the risk that Denmark would pass on a warning to Germany. I don't see why France would be moving to Swabia otherwise. Also, he ordered a support of the Byz army in Dalmatia. Why do that? At the very least, he is telling somebody that he's going to attack Germany.

Nigs is playing the role of the guy in the back who gets other people to fight the big nasty alliance while he grabs the crumbs for himself. And when somebody becomes unnecessary, he grabs the dots for himself. It's what he did to Spain and I expect it's what he's doing to Germany.

He's got Sardinia, and I assume he'll let Byz take Sicily while he tries to guess right and take Corisca (F BLS could cut either possible support).

Otherwise, with the investment of a single army but a lot of help from Denmark, he will gain a Russian center in the north, leaving Yug free to pressure Arabia.

Yes, I think it is time for the French led alliance to start attacking Arabia directly.

Has France been making difficult attacks directly, or trying to get others to do it for him?

I'm sure France wants people to attack Arabia. I don't know if Byz thinks this is a great idea.

In the south, he has taken Sardinia and will take Corsica this fall,

...might take Corsica in the Fall.

probably leaving Sicily to Byzantium and finishing off Spain. His fleets have moved south, to help Wagadu against the marauding Indonesians. If he does stab Germany this year, it will be a fantastic season for him.

I think he will still hold off, but agree it is possible.

As predicted, Germany lost Kiev but gained Smolensk. He might be able to regain Kiev and keep Smolensk this fall, if Denmark helps him -- but will Denmark do that?

Why not? Remember this fact. The Danish and Germans have worked together seamlessly throughout this attack. It only changes if there is a stab, which might come from France acting alone, but the Danish will assist the Germans this fall.

Germany made an oddly passive defense against Byzantium in the south. Macedonia was condemned,

but he could have used it to attack Thrace. Instead, he simply supported with Ono, and the excellent Byzantine tactician popped his army.

Agreed, this was predictable given Gregory's excellent tactical skill. I guess I wonder, maybe Suzanne is right and Germany goes down hard now. Maybe Germany was getting tactical help from Nigs that was not forthcoming this season.

This is part of why I think Germany has been sold out. His tactics in Macedonia were terrible, but a reasonable thing for him to have tried to do would be to hit Dalmatia with support from Aqui and Sla. If he'd even tried to do this with just his own support, the army in Macedonia would have survived.

The fact that France _supported_ the army in Dalmatia instead of supporting a German attack (which would have worked) leads me to think that France is working with Byz (or trying to) and selling out Germany.

Germany made the obvious retreat. No real choice there.

Correct, that's all he could do.

Russia acknowledges that the northern centers are lost, and makes a guessing game around their defense. But he is outnumbered. If Byzantium drops him, he is entirely lost.

Right, I agree that is possible, but either way Russia does not last much longer. Russia has now fallen below the level where they have much to offer anyone. But I might try Arabia to stay in the game. Arabia could help Russia a bit. And so could the Samanid. Russia should not just go quietly.

Russia also makes the obvious retreat. No real choice.

Again, with one choice, in spring, there is no choice.

Maybe somebody will support his attack on Smolensk? (Or maybe Denmark will try to take it for himself?)

Byzantium is weaving a strange dance with the French units, both in North Africa and south of Russia. Has France offered him alliance and help against Germany, if he drops his Russian ally? While France replaced him in the Tyrranean sea, he moved into Ifr. While France supported Dalmatia, he moved it northwards and brought a new army into Dalmatia.

An alliance with a more solid power would do Byzantium no end of good, but he doesn't seem to be taking France up on it. Or is France too solid a power for his taste?

I was not initially convinced, but as we work through the moves, this is looking stronger that Nigs and Gregory are working something out. I suppose the question is: does Germany go down this season as a result?

Yes!

Agreed. what better time?

Consider the Byz convoy out of Spoleto. And in exchange, France is handing him Sicily and Ifriqya. Byz can also force Ongoria in the Fall.

If Byz and France were fighting, they would be fighting over Rome. Instead, Byz pulls away.

Byz is exactly the person who can do something about Arabia, which is why Nigs wants to work with him.

End of game for Spain. Probably out this year.

Right, almost certainly gone.

Coin flip for F BLS. France doesn't have an uncuttable support.

Wagadu was all set up to take advantage of Axum's being busy with Arabia and get his home centers back. Unfortunately for him, Axum and Arabia seem to have negotiated their differences, and Axum is back in force. Wagadu will probably get Niore back this year, but Axum will be able to retake Kanem, and his forces outnumber anything Wagadu can put into play.

I agree with Suzanne that rapprochement with Arabia is not good for the Wagadu. France is committed to holding the Atlantic wall against fleet incursion, but it is not clear if there is anything else France can or will do to help the Wagadu more substantially. The central African area is very tricky tactically and Mikael hasn't shown an ability to outguess B. yet.

Wagadu is retaking Niore. Kanem was not his SC so if he retakes Niore and doesn't lose anything, he'll get another army to use. He could put the new army in Waleta and go after Jenne-Jeno. Axum can defend Niore by attacking it from Jeliba(by) with support from Awd. But if he does that, he won't be able to force a recapture of Kanem.

Either way, this should be a year where Wag nets one SC from Axum, and he could build an army in Africa. Presuming France doesn't sell him out.

As I expected, Axum and Arabia seem to have renegotiated an agreement. Axum apparently gets Jerusalem as well as Yemen, but that's it. still, it gives him a solid position, not only in Africa

but also in the eastern Med, if he wants to go that way.

I think Axum realized that he couldn't let the Srivijayans get that powerful, while Arabia did not threaten him. Who else will Axum get to attack France? There must be a bigger push into the Mediterranean.

Axum seems to have come to some kind of accord with Arabia. But I don't quite get the abandonment of Zimbabwe. Why support himself out of Zimbabwe to let Indonesia in? Is it to give Indonesia more of an ability to move fleets against Wagadu and France?

I don't get what Axum is up to here.

Arabia apparently handled the Axum stab by negotiation. He will lose Jerusalem to Axum, but he doesn't risk crumbling. It's much slower going against Samanid this year, but he is steadily gnawing away at the remaining Samanid centers, along with China and possibly Denmark. He took back Atil this spring and will probably take Urg this fall. Since he will lose Jerusalem, that gives him a net gain of one. But Samanid will have multiple disbands this fall, which should simplify taking the remaining centers next year.

This agreement with the Axum makes the Samanid stab be reasonably successful for Arabia. I still thought the Samanid would have rolled up China and then been able to break that whole side of the board, but it just was taking too long. The real problem is how to get at France, just doesn't seem possible. France will outpace Arabia and then who knows? Matt needs to be trying to get the French allies to turn.

He has left the control of the seas to Axum and Indonesia, keeping only the Arabian Sea. In spite of Indonesia's advances in southern India, he can probably hold central India, with good tactics.

Not once the Chinese armies show up. By stabbing Samanid, the entire face of that front has changed. Instead of being boxed in, the Eastern alliance has been let out, and their position will be strong enough to roll back Arabia eventually. Unless, for some unfathomable reason, France decides to work with him instead of China.

That's probably true, especially since the Samanid have not coordinated effectively with China since the stab.

After years of holding, are we in for years of hitting Kannauj? It doesn't look like it will fall this year, at least not to Arabia. It looks like the Eastern Alliance will be the ones to finish India off. And after all India will not only have outlasted Egypt and Khazaria, but probably Spain as well.

Fall Adjudications

Arabian A Ali - Urg
Arabian A Ati H
Arabian A Bal S A Ati
Arabian A Blk - Sam *Bounce*
Arabian A Buk S A Ali - Urg
Arabian A Dam - Ale *Invalid*
Arabian A Ghu S A Ali - Urg
Arabian A Ind S A Knj
Arabian A Isf - Bag
Arabian A Kas - Sog *Bounce*
Arabian A Kip - Kyk *Bounce*
Arabian A Knj S A Ujj - Ras *Cut*
Dislodged
Arabian A Man - Ujj *Bounce*
Arabian A Sev S A Kie
Arabian A Sha S A Man - Ujj
Arabian A Srk S A Ati
Arabian A Ujj - Ras *Bounce*
Arabian F Ars H
Arabian F Oma S F Ars

Axum A Ale - Zaw
Axum A Awd S A Jel - Nio
Axum A Daj S A Zaw - Kan
Axum A Jej - Bsk
Axum A Jel - Nio *Bounce*
Axum A Lub - Jel *Bounce*
Axum A Sud S A Zaw - Kan
Axum A Zaw - Kan
Axum F Gad S F Soc
Axum F Mes S F Gad
Axum F Soc S F Gad
Axum F Srs S F Yem
Axum F Yem S F Gad

Byzantine A Con - Thr
Byzantine A Dal S A Sla - Ono
Void
Byzantine A Mac S A Dal
Byzantine A Thr - Ava

Byzantine A Vla S A Thr - Ava
Byzantine F Epi - Ios *Bounce*
Byzantine F Ifr - Lis
Byzantine F IIs S A Dal
Byzantine F Ios - Scl *Bounce*

Chinese A Cha S A Uyg
Chinese A Khi - Orb
Chinese A Orb - Sam
Chinese A Tib S A Uyg
Chinese A Uyg S A Orb - Sam
Chinese F Yes H

Danish A Che - Bja *Bounce*
Danish A Kom - Bja *Bounce*
Danish A Liv S A Smo
Danish A Nov S A Ros *Cut*
Danish F Bja - Whs
Danish F Fis S A Nov
Danish F Ics S F Ngs
Danish F Ngs S F Ics

French A Gra H
French A Lom - Rom
French A Rom - Slr
French A Ros S A Nov
French A Sla S A Aqu - Dal
French A Swa H
French A Tah - Ifr
French A Val H
French A Yug S A Bas
French F Lgs - Crs *Bounce*
Dislodged
French F Nos - Swo
French F Sar S F Crs - Tys *Void*
French F Sjt S A Tah - Ifr
French F Sta S F Nos - Swo
French F Tys - Scl *Bounce*

German A Aqu - Dal *Bounce*
German A Maz - Kie *Bounce*

German A Ono S A Aqu - Dal
German A Smo S A Maz - Kie
Cut
German A Vis S A Ono
German A Vol S A Maz - Kie

Indian A Var S A Ras - Knj

Russian A Kar - Nov *Bounce*
Russian A Kie S A Kri - Smo *Cut*
Russian A Kri - Smo *Bounce*
Russian A Pec S A Kie

Samanid A Bas S A Mrd - Ati
Samanid A Kyk - Kip *Bounce*
Samanid A Mrd - Ati *Bounce*
Samanid A Sam S A Sog *Cut*
Dislodged
Samanid A Sog S A Sam *Cut*
Samanid A Udm S A Mrd - Ati
Samanid A Vya - Bul

Spanish F Bls - Lgs
Spanish F Crs S F Bls - Lgs

Srivijayan A Chl S A Ras - Knj
Srivijayan A Ras - Knj
Srivijayan F Cho - Ras *Bounce*
Srivijayan F Cob - Mas *Bounce*
Srivijayan F Gos S F Zim
Srivijayan F Mah S F Cob - Mas
Srivijayan F Mas - Ujj *Bounce*
Srivijayan F Sus S F Cob - Mas
Srivijayan F Zim S F Gos

Wagadu A Aga - Tir
Wagadu A Kan H *Dislodged*
Wagadu A Kus S A Wal - Nio
Wagadu A Wal - Nio *Bounce*
Wagadu F Sos - Jel *Bounce*
Wagadu F Tas - Awl

Retreat Possibilities

Arabian A Knj can retreat to Nep or disband
French F LgS can retreat to LBU, Lom, Nar, SpM or disband
Samanid A Sam can retreat to Qar or disband
Wagadu A Kan can retreat to Aga, Tah or disband

Retreat Adjudications

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) disbands A Knj
French F Lgs retreats to Lom
Samanid Emirate (Turan) disbands A Sam
Wagadu A Kan retreats to Aga

Position Power Abb 907 908 Change SCs changing possession

1 Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) A 19 20 +1 +Ati, -Knj, +Urg
2 West Frankish Kingdom (France) F 15 17 +2 +Ros, +Sar
3 Kingdom of Axum X 13 12 -1 -Zim
4 Kingdom of Sri Vijaya V 9 11 +2 +Knj, +Zim
5 Byzantine Empire B 9 9 0
6 Tang Empire (China) C 6 9 +3 +OrB, +Sam, +Uyg
7 Kingdom of Denmark D 8 9 +1 +Nov
8 East Frankish Kingdom (German) G 7 7 0 -Kie, +Smo
9 Kingdom of Wagadu W 6 6 0
10 Principality of Kiev (Russia) R 4 2 -2 +Kie, -Nov, -Ros, -Smo

11 Umayyad Emirate (Spain) S 3 2 -1 -Sar
12 Samanid Emirate (Turan) T 7 2 -5 -Ati, -OrB, -Sam, -Urg, -Uyg
13 Pratihara Kingdom (India) I 1 1 0

Adjustments

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) builds 2 units, can build in Ard, Arm, Aze, Bsr, Geo, Her, Isf, Jer, Tam
Byzantine Empire makes no adjustments
Tang Empire (China) builds 3 units, can build in Kai, Nan, Sil, Yan
Kingdom of Denmark builds 1 unit, can build in Bja, Bor, Est, Jln, Jor (ec), Jor, Jor (wc), Sca, Vik, Wsx
Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) makes no adjustments
West Frankish Kingdom (France) builds 2 units, can build in Aqt, Bri, Cor, Dub, Gas, LBU, Lot, Nar, Pam, Par, Rom (ec), Rom, Rom (wc), Sal
East Frankish Kingdom (German) builds 1 unit, can build in Bav, Bre, Mor, Pol, Sax
Pratihara Kingdom (India) makes no adjustments
Khaganate of Khazaria makes no adjustments
Principality of Kiev (Russia) disbands 2 units
Umayyad Emirate (Spain) makes no adjustments
Samanid Emirate (Turan) disbands 4 units
Kingdom of Sri Vijaya builds 2 units, can build in But, Cah, Jam, Kal, Kam, Plm, Ser
Kingdom of Wagadu makes no adjustments
Kingdom of Axum disbands 1 unit
Neutral makes no adjustments

Fall and Autumn 908 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Ah, nothing is ever that clear and net in Diplomacy. Here we all had such good ideas about where the players were going, but things didn't turn out as we expected. Byzantine didn't join the ranks of the French coalition, and Germany wasn't stabbed. Although all the options may still be open another year...

They well could be, but I would not bet the farm on it. I think what we saw is mostly the evidence that France has his eye on the solo, and when and until Germany is in the way of that, he is safe. Nigs is controlling his perimeter. As far as Gregory and the Byzantines, this is more complicated. It does seem like the Byzantines need some ally. But since Nigs has his other array of allies, there is no room in the tent for Gregory, so what France has in mind is complete domination of the Mediterranean. Gregory is a brilliant tactician, as we've noted multiple times both from the evidence here and elsewhere, so their progress will be slow, but I don't see any sort of line for Byzantium to stand on. So, it looks to me like we have (in the end) Mike and Lynn in the Juggernaut coming west losing to France going east. I don't see what B. and Matt in Azum and Arabia can do except be squeezed. We shall see though, they clearly are trying to figure something out.

Well, when we have no access to the negotiations, it's easy to be fooled by a feint.

Denmark brought his Bja fleet back to the seas; he

now has three fleets lined up for possible convoys, one way or another. He supported himself and both of his allies in the northern Russian territories.

Right, I think there is a conscious plan in the French/Danish/German orbit for the Danes to start building armies in Jelling/Great Britain and start conveying them over. And then these armies can use Yugra defending a line against Chinese incursion, and armies can eliminate the Samanid and drive into Arabia from the north. Obviously, that is just being set up this turn, with not much else going on of great import.

Denmark is definitely committed to the alliance. Also, the withdrawal of the French fleets gives him a lot of security. He could even take Ireland.

Now the next thing to think about is, presuming Russia falls completely, what are the next lines of defense against the Western powers (and who will man the lines?)

Global variants tend to suffer from the presence of mini-stalemate lines, and this map is chock full of them. The Western alliance could have 55 forces, but it wouldn't matter because China could keep them out of Asian with four forces. Or Arabia.

Apparently, France didn't care much for the cavalier manner in which Byzantium took his alliance offer. Not only did he not (yet) stab Germany, but he

decided to deprive Byzantium not only of Ifr, but also of Sicily, at the cost of taking Corsica. In fact, he seems to have offered Spain a home on Sicily -- but Spain preferred dislodging France's fleet. France is going to have to use at least one of his builds to cover the unprotected territories in southern France. Maybe he would have done better finishing Spain off.

The French clearly are living and prospering by the mantra, decide where you want to be at the end of the game, and get there. I do think there were offers to Byzantium, but now that they are rejected, that is the focus. Spain cannot grow appreciably, there is no hurry to take it off the map. The task of defending southern France against Spain only is difficult if Nigs is thinking of stabbing Germany. In fact, if one wanted to be deeply suspicious, then keeping Spain here, tying up some units, keeps them set near Germany to stab in a couple of game years after Spain finally is out, but so is Russia and Byzantium is on his knees. France also is being a bit careful with setting up that line (F Sta S F Nos-Swo) in the Atlantic, this illustrates that his goal is to get to Jerusalem more than Zimbabwe.

It would have been interesting to read the correspondence that went with this season, among France, Byzantium and Spain. ;)

If they are indeed talking, it seems to me that these are almost "gunboat orders", made anonymously to convey interest. But since the number one complaint against us commentators is how we do not, and cannot, track who is saying what to whom, I am not going to comment further about that.

France is also moving fleets in place to block any Indonesian incursion near Europe.

Carefully, as I said, making moves with supports that technically shouldn't be necessary. I still believe that France eventually is going to let the Wagadu go. Again, no need to hasten it, but Mikael must see the handwriting on the wall.

France has picked up Sardinia and will pick up Corsica in short order. The tactics near Taranto are interesting, but it's hard to imagine that he'll blast his way past the middle of the Med.

I had hoped that France would be up for some alliance shifting. The truth about the Western alliance is that it's unlikely to expand beyond Europe. That might be viewed as a flaw in the map structure. The land areas are fairly homogeneous from a topological perspective (i.e. most of the land provinces have a number of neighbors in a limited range) and the number of sea areas is just too small for naval power to really be all that useful.

Germany moved a little better tactically this season. He should have been able to retake Kiel with these moves, if Arabia hadn't snuck in a support for the Germany army in Kiel. Still, he is in a very weak position, and can be stabbed brutally whenever France wishes.

I think last season was just a little blip for Germany in coordination, the sort of real life thing that just happens, I think the long term plan remains in place. As noted above, there is the second level worry that France is intentionally remaining in a battle with Spain over Corsica attempting to leave units in the "back" near Germany for a later stab. This is not a bad ploy to use, but so far it really doesn't matter much and Germany has little choice but to go along, since Denmark and France would crush him if he defects.

Germany doesn't really have avenues for growth at this point. The Western alliance is too coordinated, and that kind of coordination tends to inspire resistance. He'll always be alive only at the sufferance of France.

Russia is just holding on. He's down to two, and without the Arabian support would have been down to one. But his Byzantine ally stayed faithful, apparently.

Arabia has a real classic problem here, he really wants the Samanid, Russia and Byzantium to hold out and slow down France/Germany/Denmark, but there is no hope of the three of them actually advancing, supporting Russia only slows the inevitable. So, would Arabia be better off grabbing all that he can first, and setting the line further north? More on that below. For Russia, Russia may be able to hold onto two next game year, which I initially doubted a while back. Good for him, but it really is only a temporary reprieve.

Russia can hold the line at Pec/Kiev for a while. It's not the easiest line to crack.

I'm not very impressed by the fact that Russia/Germany have been at war for years, in a war that neither of them will win.

This time it is Byzantium who is signaling France about an alliance (see especially the support for France into Ono), but France isn't buying. Will they get together finally. Tune in same time, same station next week...

Again, for once, I will say, maybe this is "negotiating by orders". I think France is going to give up on any alliance hope here and just slog it out. Solid defenses by Byzantium tactically.

Byzantium lost out here, so far. Apparently, France would prefer more reliability in an ally.

But seems unable to buy an ally diplomatically (except for the dying Russians).

I think France hosed Byz for the minor advantage of getting some position on the boot. The lack of builds is a shame, as Byz would probably need another fleet to keep up with France. He can force control of Sicily if he wants.

Spain seems to have come back to life. It would seem that France offered him Sicily, but he found a game more to his liking...

Spain made the interesting choice. Now how far does France push east and let taking Sicily be the pathway to the Spanish demise? I say that's what France does, so Spain lives two more game years.

Spain flailed out and got lucky. The luck won't last.

Wagadu (perhaps pushed by France) is focusing his defenses to the south with the armies. The fleets are not being pressed by anyone yet, and France has a fleet line further north. This doesn't really look like strong support from France, but Mikael is still hanging in there. I salute Mikael/Nigs for figuring out that handing Cadiz to the Wagadu at that instant would be so crucial. Touche on the tactics there. Axum is suffering and will not overwhelm Wagadu quickly, though I still think the center/unit positions make an Axum victory the eventual outcome.

The thing to watch out for here is the possibility of French armies being convoyed down to Africa. Without a little help, I think Axum has the upper hand. But it wouldn't take much to stop him.

Axum doesn't take Jerusalem after all, but rather goes back to hitting Wagadu with a vengeance. So, in sum, it was a one-dot stab after all.

It may have been a one dot stab, OR more likely it was a Cadiz deal. Axum still loses one more this turn.

I think Suzanne meant that Yemen was a 1-dot stab.

Yes, that's what I meant.

The disband should be interesting. Does he yank the fleet in the Red Sea? Or can that be headed towards the Med? He could yank an army from West Africa, but I'm not expecting that. I'd expect Army Daju to be the extraneous force.

I still don't completely understand why he lost Zimbabwe. It's not like Indonesia had the strength to force it, and Axum could also put together a reasonable counter-attack to retake it.

Good tactics against Wagadu, but the loss of

Zimbabwe costs him a center.

Yes, and it is unclear what happens when Sri Vijaya succeeds at starting to plant armies on the African continent. The long-term outlook for Axum just does not look good, even as he does well against the Wagadu.

Arabia did what he could to save Knj, but it wasn't quite enough, as the Indonesian player spotted the possible defense.

Sri Vijaya and China can operate like a well oiled machine, the Juggernaut is ramped up again and that means trouble for Arabia. At this long deep point into the game, I just don't see how Matt can split them, but again, that seems to be the question. The Samanid are gone, but Arabia just didn't gain enough from it, it would have been better for Arabia to have a strong Samanid and an eliminated China, even if that didn't help him either.

Samanid is now nearly finished off, and he will probably not get Bulgar. Time for a new re-definition of objectives.

Agreed, and the key is whether Arabia goes for those centers or not, and how he reacts to Byzantium/Russia. I think Arabia tries to finish off the Samanid himself.

I thought that he was giving Jerusalem to Axum. But maybe not. Did he mean to move back to Jerusalem and bounce Axum? Not sure what that disorder indicates.

I'm not sure either. It might just be keeping that unit there, waiting for the advance. More likely it is finally time for Arabia to build in Jerusalem, possibly even a fleet. If a fleet, then maybe the disorder was a flimsy way to keep the center open? I don't believe the disorder was anything but intentional, in general you go farthest by always assuming that anyway.

Arabia really needs to build a fleet in Jerusalem, to help Byz hold the line against France. The line in India has been pushed back a bit, but Arabia doesn't really have to worry about being pushed back further on the Indian front.

Can Arabia, Axum, and Byz really hold back both the Western alliance on one side and the Eastern alliance on the other? Perhaps.

Is India better off surrounded by the eastern alliance? Not at all sure. At any rate, for a power who was supposed to have disappeared several game-years ago, he has an astonishing ability to survive. ;)

Why not live? But India is pretty irrelevant, I cannot see Sri Vijaya helping him get his country back.

No, India won't be getting builds. But there's also no need to snuff him out.

It seems that Samanid, one of the great powers three game years ago, may go out before India. How things change...

The question is who gains what? Can the last two Samanid centers go to Arabia? I just do not think that stab was worth it to Matt, as the final story emerges. The Juggernaut is re-energized and pushing forward. The Samanid space has Frenchmen in it. Not good for Arabia. No question that John R. has no more friends left and will be out, though theoretically, Arabia could back him up as well as Russia and Byzantium.

No, I do not think the stab was worth it. Had Arabia not stabbed, he and Samanid would have had the advantage in Russia. Instead, the advantage goes to the Western alliance. Also, the stab let China off the hook just when he'd gotten too weak to stop a land invasion.

I don't know who said what to Arabia to get the stab motivated. But somehow, it is going to kill Samanid - probably next year. I don't know what forces he'll keep, but I'm certain that the Westies are going to get Bulgar. Bas could go either way.

And yes, he will die before India.

China, as the GM points out, was one of the big winners from Arabia's stab. But his options are limited again. The only spaces he has free to build in are far to the east, and probably won't help him advance from here.

I disagree, though this was the big pick-up, taking the Samanid out, I think that they can wear away at Arabia. The Samanid should remove the two units not supporting any centers that are in Lynn's way. But the advance certainly will be very slow until Arabia starts losing centers from the north. This anticipates (as I

expect) that France continues to work to keep Yugra and makes no attempt to go further East into China. Also, I would hold at least one Chinese build as waived and wait to be able to build it closer to the front next year.

Delaying a build would be clever, but I don't anticipate it.

Can the Easties really push through India? It's not clear to me. The Samanid removals won't help them. Indeed, China's been far too greedy here for his own good. If Samanid removes his two armies in Central Asia, Arabia will have the upper hand over China in the short run.

Indonesia is the other big winner; and he may have more possibilities left. Can he whittle Arabia down further?

I don't see why Suzanne suggests China is stuck but Indonesia has advances to make? Why would Mike and Lynn stop working closely together now? And their units can pour into the Indian area. Admittedly, Mike also has Africa as a possible front.

I still don't know what's up with Zimbabwe. I suspect that was a deal made along the lines of "well, if you need an opening to fight France, take Zimbabwe and now you have a path to do so." But Indonesia is not advancing. He could have been in the Western Sea, but he appears to be content to let France block that possible advance.

I'm souring on this variant. There are too many mini-stalemate lines and the situation is hardly fluid at all. (Of course, I think the regular map has too many mini-stalemate lines, too.) I also think this particular game is stagnating into three roughly fixed alliances. When Arabia stabbed, I bet he hoped one of the other alliances would crack, too. But since they haven't, expect this game to slow down to a tactical grind. There are many fluid areas of the map. But I think the next big question is whether and how France can get some forces moved into Africa. If he can, then this game may develop even further. But if not, then I don't think the Westies will get beyond Europe, and there will be a giant 3-alliance draw.

Winter 908 Results

Adjustment Adjudications

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) Builds A Tam
Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) waives one build

Tang Empire (China) Builds A Kai
Tang Empire (China) Builds A Yan
Tang Empire (China) Builds A Sil

Kingdom of Denmark Builds A Bja

West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Lbu
West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Nar

East Frankish Kingdom (German) Builds A Mor

Principality of Kiev (Russia) Disbands A Kar
Principality of Kiev (Russia) Disbands A Kri

Samanid Emirate (Turan) Disbands A Kyk
Samanid Emirate (Turan) Disbands A Mrd
Samanid Emirate (Turan) Disbands A Sog
Samanid Emirate (Turan) Disbands A Udm

Kingdom of Sri Vijaya Builds A Ser
Kingdom of Sri Vijaya Builds F Jam
Kingdom of Axum Disbands A Lub

Position Power Abb 907 908 Change SCs changing possession

1 Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) A 19 20 +1 +Ati, -Knj, +Urg
2 West Frankish Kingdom (France) F 15 17 +2 +Ros, +Sar
3 Kingdom of Axum X 13 12 -1 -Zim
4 Kingdom of Sri Vijaya V 9 11 +2 +Knj, +Zim
5 Byzantine Empire B 9 9 0
6 Tang Empire (China) C 6 9 +3 +OrB, +Sam, +Uyg
7 Kingdom of Denmark D 8 9 +1 +Nov
8 East Frankish Kingdom (German) G 7 7 0 -Kie, +Smo
9 Kingdom of Wagadu W 6 6 0
10 Principality of Kiev (Russia) R 4 2 -2 +Kie, -Nov, -Ros, -Smo
11 Umayyad Emirate (Spain) S 3 2 -1 -Sar
12 Samanid Emirate (Turan) T 7 2 -5 -Ati, -OrB, -Sam, -Urg, -Uyg
13 Pratihara Kingdom (India) I 1 1 0
14 Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) E 0 0 0
15 Khaganate of Khazaria K 0 0 0
16 Neutral N 0 0 0

Winter 908 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Denmark didn't even have to convoy an army. He took advantage of the chaos builds to build right on the Russian/Samadian/Arabian front.

He's set up to take Bulgar and then continue on southwards. Still, the growth possibilities here are limited. Arabia is going to be able to block his advance quite soon.

That's right, but options, options, better to have the convoy line set up. Bulgar, of course, falls for sure in the Spring, so surely that it is worth waiting until Fall to try to get into Vyatichia with support from Rostov in Spring and then go for Bulgar in the Fall. The key to this line is whether France can maintain the line at Yugra and the Chinese are far enough back that this is possible. Nigs was very forward-thinking in going there in the first place. Plus, we do not know for sure yet if China moves up behind as the Samanid die to praise Caesar (Arabia) or stab him. If there is a three way battle at this front, it is by no means clear that Arabia can hold it.

I suspect that Samanid is offering to support Denmark if he'll bypass his two SCs. Since Denmark can take Bulgar whenever he wants at this point, they might be considering this.

France built a fleet in each of the southern French territories that Spain could threaten. He's setting up the western Med as a French sea -- and after all, he's got the muscle to do so. Byzantium can oppose him, but military power is on his side.

This signals more than that, it signals that we will see convoys to North Africa and an attempt to break into the Eastern Med. France now has six fleets here, and

unless he can break through the Sicilian bottleneck, they will quickly become useless. Grenada and Valencia both can be convoyed across, and then the fleet can be supported to Ifriqiya, while Spain is taken out. It is not certain, but I think it works in France's favor.

France continues to play the fleet strategy. I forgot to mention my interpretation of the Spring moves last year. The result of those moves was that Byz no longer had an army on the boot. That change in deployment may make it possible for France to drive past Italy. Given the excellence of the Byzantine tactics, I would not be too optimistic here if I were France.

Also, to follow up what I was saying after the Fall moves, I think that France needs to pour armies into Africa rather than trying to blast through the Med. Of course, the diplomatic situation may not allow that.

Germany becomes an important ally of France in this endeavor, putting the pressure on the Russian-Byzantine territories north of the Med. Normally, he should get Dalmatia and eventually Kiev -- unless he lets France take them in his stead.

No evidence at all of a break in the German/Danish/French alliance. So, does Germany have anything better to do? The way is starting to become possible to stab France, what matters is Germany's goals in the endgame, does he care if France wins he gets a major survival? If he wants more than that, the time to stab France is BEFORE Byzantium collapses. BUT, without two builds for Bavaria and Saxony to attack Swabia, there seemingly is no opening. France is playing it beautifully and do not expect him to permit Germany to get two builds in a

turn. Denmark could build one fleet in Wessex and then perhaps raise some havoc, but would it make them better off in the longer run? Probably not.

Germany is completely blocked in the middle. And with the French in Swabia, I still hate this position. It's not like the French army can "help". Or rather, it can "help" but certainly cannot help.

As predicted, Russia dropped the now-useless northern armies and is set to hold on to Kiev/Pechenegs, with Byzantium's help. No possibility of growth, but, as Rick said, he can hold on to that for a long time.

I guess the question is whether Kiev really can hold out for awhile or not. Cheremissia to Vyatichia with two supports should work to put four on Kiev. But then that isn't enough if Arabia is helping to hold that line. Remember that Arabia so far still has been a bit wishy-washy on his commitment to Kiev/Byzantium. But I think the math in Darren's favor works much better here than in Matt's regarding Lynn's move west. So this part of the front could lock up while we wait to see what happens as the Samanid goes out.

I think Arabia has realized the futility of trying to go it alone. He's not going to be able to push up to Bulgar, so he might as well prop up anybody willing to stand in the way of the Westies. I think holding Kiev is worth the slight effort.

Axum shows that he is renouncing Zimbabwe. Was this part of an agreement with Indonesia, the center in exchange for putting pressure on the Wagadu naval forces? We ought to see that this year.

This also shows that Axum is going to keep moving on the Wagadu themselves as well. As noted, eventually the Wagadu become a naval shell locking up the Atlantic while French armies convoying into North Africa become the opposition to B. So the question is now the wider one. If the Axum and Arabia are allies, and China and Sri Vijaya are allies, are Arabia and China allies?? Not necessarily.

Yes, this was a very interesting disband. Axum is definitely ceding Zimbabwe to Sri Vijaya in the hope that the latter will find other ground. If Axum and Indonesia work together, they might be able to push back the Wagadu fleets. If this works, the Axum might have the advantage inland.

Arabia is still concentrating on the Northern front -- the two remaining Samanid territories and the front against the Western coalition. Will he be shoring up Russia, or trying to nibble on what's left of the bear on the other side?

And also adroitly waives a build, clearly intending to

build it up north also after a center is cleared taking out the Samanid Bashkortostan center. It is certainly possible for Arabia to be attacking here, but it really is time to begin stopping France somewhere.

He carefully avoided building in Jerusalem, perhaps to reassure Axum. A pity, a fleet in Jerusalem would have been interesting. But he has avoided building fleets there up to now, looks like he's set to continue.

This is clearly some sort of deal, though remember it could be a deal with France. Axum would have nothing to say about this, Arabia is relying on Byzantium to hold the line, so he has to start manifesting his support.

The army in Tam shores up the Russian front. I can see the wisdom of the waive. It lets Arabia build a fleet later in the Med or the Khazar sea if needed.

Samanidia dropped everything to his south, including his original home centers, and is hanging on to Bulgar and Bashkortistan. But between Denmark and Arabia, it's a lost cause. He ought to be out this year.

Yes, I might have tried to keep something more interesting that two unconnected units sitting on supply centers, which then become targets. I would bet on France and his allies avoiding Bulgar in Spring and using Bulgar to support Bashkortistan to Udmurtia. But it is still a lost cause with no reason for anyone to support you. Keeping other armies could have created an option. That's a lesson, don't always just keep the units sitting on supply centers, it nearly always doesn't work unless they are adjacent and can support each other to hold.

Samanid squats on the only SCs he might possibly hold. Bulgar is at the mercy of Denmark, and Bash could be taken by Arabia if it's not supported by the French. The disbands on the Central Asian front should make it easier for Arabia to find a defensive position to stop the Chinese.

China is continuing to be an entirely land power, building three armies in the far far east (including one in Sil (Korea) rather than Nanking, apparently just to show his Indonesian ally that he still trusts him completely.

No surprise, but China also should have waived at least one build, I can't say it more strongly, why build in Sil (Korea)??? Sure it shows trust of Indonesia, but waiving also would have accomplished that. Most players miss good waiving chances.

These armies will take a very long time to get anywhere outside of his own homelands.

That's for sure, it takes three turns to get it to Tunguz, the closest province of use. Waiving only costs two turns and then you get to build it even closer.

You've convinced me. A waive followed by a build in Ordu-Balyk would have been more useful. Also, without the two Samanid armies on the front he might have difficulty holding Samarkand.

Indonesia, on the other hand, is still building armies (well, one army) that looks like it is meant to be convoyed to Ras, on the western Indian coast. With China's help, he will perhaps continue to chip away at Arabia's hold on India.

The army seems to indicate that not only does Axum/Sri Vijaya alliance not mean China and Arabia are allied, it may not even mean Sri Vijaya and Arabia are allied.

Wait - what? You've confused me with 'nots'. I think you're saying "A ally with B" and "B ally with C" does not imply "A ally with C".

Yes, this is a good example of how alliance relationships are often far from transitive.

I don't see any reason (from the Juggernaut perspective) why Mike and Lynn won't just keep pushing forward. And if they do, they keep gaining centers, slowly. Diplomatically, if you're going to do that, you need to get someone to slow France down. Unfortunately, if that is Arabia attacking him does not make him warm and fuzzy toward Jerusalem fleets.

It's not clear to me that China and Indonesia will be capable of pushing forward. The army (which will certainly be convoyed to India) may not be capable of doing anything more than clogging the line.

Byzantium has a choice about Sicily. Does he just leave it and let France take it (this year, but perhaps not until next) or does he try to take it, possibly losing Taranto now? I think he could walk into Sicily in the spring, actually, but then Epirus would have to move to the Ionian and the line gets a bit thin. I expect Gregory to make the best tactical move, so if he leaves Sicily alone, I would hunt to see what he sees that I don't see at the moment. Still, yeah, Arabia didn't build F Jerusalem, but Byzantium continues to have little chance to grow.

Let's not forget about those two Spanish fleets. I would guess they'll be blasting away at the Tyrrhennian Sea. And yes, I think Byz should try for Sicily. It's not a position that he can let France have.

OK, Wagadu has six units left, two of them fleets. The fleets eventually lock up the Atlantic, so yes, Sri Vijaya can bring it on, but at best gets Awlil, big deal. That's why I'm not as sure as Suzanne seems to be that Sri Vijaya attacks at all. Even with the army advantage from the center behind the line, Wagadu still worries entirely about Axum. Axum slows way down now as the Wagadu armies can defend the two centers for awhile. But eventually, with Axum attacking with seven armies, the Wagadu are pushed back, so it is inevitable.

Any fun moves for Spain? Probably not. But Ligurian Sea to Tyrrhenian Sea with support of Corsica is probably the best bet, in any case Ligurian Sea might as well move somewhere (Balearic Sea is the other option) since it will almost surely be attacked with two supports.

And on India goes. Does Varanasi actually move to Nepal now?? It is possible. When did India actually last move somewhere, wasn't it years ago now? India will survive as long as they work with the Eastern Juggernaut, though and that could be until the end of the game.

Spring and Summer 909 Results

The Spring 909 season has been adjudicated. On the board, the major development is the meeting of Arabian and Chinese armies in the Himalayas for what will surely be a titanic war. Elsewhere, the end appears very near for both the Umayyids and Samanids. How many more players can Andy outlive?!? In Eastern Europe, the battlelines appear to be drawn, with the West Franks/East Franks/Danes facing off against the Byzantines, Kievans, and Arabians.

Off the board, we have another major development: an anonymous 7-way draw proposal between (I have placed in alphabetical order) Arabia, Axum, Byzantium, Denmark, East Franks, Tang Dynasty, and Sri Vijaya. If all players vote yes, then the draw proposal will pass.

Spring Adjudications

Arabian A Ati - Udm *Bounce*
Arabian A Bag - Bsr
Arabian A Bal - Ati *Bounce*
Arabian A Blk - Sog
Arabian A Buk S A Man - Blk
Arabian A Dam H

Arabian A Ghu - Kyk
Arabian A Ind S F Ars - Ujj
Arabian A Kas S A Blk - Sog
Arabian A Kip S A Bal - Ati
Arabian A Man - Blk
Arabian A Sev - Vya *Bounce*
Arabian A Sha S F Ars - Ujj

Arabian A Srk - Mrd
Arabian A Tam - Srk
Arabian A Ujj - Man
Arabian A Urg S A Ghu - Kyk
Arabian F Ars - Ujj
Arabian F Oma - Ars

Axum A Awd S A Jel - Nio
 Axum A Bsk S A Jel - Nio
 Axum A Daj - Zaw
 Axum A Jel - Nio
 Axum A Kan S A Sud - Jel
 Axum A Sud - Jel
 Axum A Zaw - Tah
 Axum F Gad S F Soc
 Axum F Mes S F Gad *Cut*
 Axum F Soc S F Gad
 Axum F Srs - Mec *Bounce*
 Axum F Yem - Mec *Bounce*

Byzantine A Ava - Ono *Bounce*
 Byzantine A Dal S A Ava - Ono *Cut*
 Byzantine A Mac S A Dal
 Byzantine A Thr S A Ava - Ono
 Byzantine A Vla - Vol *Bounce*
 Byzantine F Epi S A Dal
 Byzantine F Ils - Tar *Bounce*
 Byzantine F Ios S F Ils - Tar
 Byzantine F Lis - Scl

Chinese A Cha - Uyg
 Chinese A Kai - Jia
 Chinese A Orb - Kyr
 Chinese A Sam - Kyk *Bounce*
 Chinese A Sil - Yan
 Chinese A Tib H
 Chinese A Uyg - Orb
 Chinese A Yan - Cha
 Chinese F Yes C A Sil - Yan

Danish A Bja - Kom *Bounce*
 Danish A Che S A Ros - Vya *Cut*
 Danish A Kom - Udm *Bounce*
 Danish A Liv - Kar
 Danish A Nov - Kri
 Danish F Fis C A Liv - Kar
 Danish F Ics - Swo
 Danish F Ngs knits some stockings (holds)
 Danish F Whs S A Yug

French A Gra - Kut
 French A Ifr - Tri
 French A Rom - Spo
 French A Ros - Vya *Bounce*
 French A Sla S A Aqu - Dal
 French A Slr S F Tys - Tar
 French A Swa - Hel
 French A Val H
 French A Yug S A Bas
 French F Lbu - Lgs
 French F Lom - Rom (wc)
 French F Nar S F Lbu - Lgs
 French F Sar - Bls
 French F Sjt C A Gra - Kut
 French F Sta - Tas
 French F Swo - Sta
 French F Tys - Tar *Bounce*

German A Aqu - Dal *Bounce*
 German A Maz S A Vol
 German A Mor S A Ono
 German A Ono S A Aqu - Dal *Cut*

German A Smo - Kie *Bounce*
 German A Vis S A Ono
 German A Vol S A Ono *Cut*

Indian A Var S A Knj

Russian A Kie S A Vla - Vol *Cut*
 Russian A Pec S A Kie

Samanid A Bas - Ati *Bounce*
 Samanid A Bul - Che *Bounce*

Spanish F Crs H
 Spanish F Lgs - Spm

Srivijayan A Chl S A Knj
 Srivijayan A Knj S A Ser - Ras
 Srivijayan A Ser - Ras
 Srivijayan F Cho S A Ser - Ras
 Srivijayan F Cob S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Gos - Sos *Bounce*
 Srivijayan F Jam - Sus
 Srivijayan F Mah S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Mas C A Ser - Ras
 Srivijayan F Sus - Phe
 Srivijayan F Zim - Mes *Bounce*

Wagadu A Aga - Wal *Bounce*
 Wagadu A Kus S A Wal - Nio
 Wagadu A Tir - Jej
 Wagadu A Wal - Nio *Bounce*
 Wagadu F Awl H
 Wagadu F Sos - Jel *Bounce*

Spring and Summer 909 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Doesn't make any ground on the Russian front. Moves to Sea of Worms. Seems bored. Might regret not taking Bulgar while it was there for the taking.

Both Denmark and Arabia spent this season trying to pre-empt each other on the two last Samanid centers. Result: Samanid has a good chance of surviving a while longer. Denmark would have been better off taking his center this spring; Arabia can now block this action.

Why the move to Sea of Worms? Simply because France requested it? Will he get anything out of that adventure?

To me, this is worth considerably more discussion than either of you gave it (though no need for a comeback, I shall try to be as complete as I can). So, one big question for Nigs is where he is trying to set the line in

the Atlantic beyond which Sri Vijaya shall not pass. There is zero interest (and essentially zero possibility) of advancing on that front, so the question is the line. The moves of the last game year or so say to me that the back of that line for the long haul is Sea of Worms/Sea of Tangiers/Tka/Mauretania. But, the goal of delaying Axum as long as possible getting there (since I think they've guaranteed Mikael a survival, but not with much, three centers are currently Wagadu behind that line, but I suspect he only gets to keep two) as moved a French fleet south. And who does get Tka? Probably France. It seemed like another fleet was needed here, so Denmark moved one down, but this also cut out the fleet train to convoy armies to the east. Are we anticipating that Denmark won't build this year? Or if he does, does he get to build a fleet? If boredom is a factor, then Denmark is in it. Lastly, just since it belongs here, Axum moved forward to Tahert and threatens Mauretania now. He can't hold it, but does he go for it? Does

France let him get in? Does France take a center he doesn't want to defend it? Does France use TWO units to bounce over it? But then does B. support one of them in with an unwanted support? All interesting. More on the Wagadu/Axum tactics below. I think Denmark is on board, but the choice to move down was a bit surprising.

Well, at least he's doing stuff.

True enough. Anyhow, he's essentially biding time until he gets eliminated.

Agreed, he hasn't made himself useful to anyone except as centers not belonging to someone else. I think it is still worth a try to toady to someone.

France/Denmark would be most likely to accept the help.

Huh? I wonder why Axum didn't block this. And France has gotten another army on Africa, which is what he needs.

You and Jim-Bob were right that he was aiming at convoying armies into North Africa, although he'll need a good deal more if he wants to make a difference there. I guess that Axum was no more convinced of this strategy than I was.

Agreed, that is the point, see how far south the army lines and battle can be set. As noted, while this worked, there is the Mauretania problem, I think France just has to move there and see if B. bounces him.

With this move, France guarantees the capture of Taranto, in addition to the capture of Barca.

Right. He was lucky with Barca, but he's been patiently working at getting all of the Italian boot for a long time.

Yes, even though Barca is a "forward center", you take it now. Sicily too, cannot be supported long term, and B. needs to defend the Egyptian centers. This breaks the Byzantine back, as I thought would happen. It is a matter of time before the Mediterranean is a French lake, and once that happens, where does he stop, since then they pincer the southern European centers and they all fall. The only chances are finding someone to make more Mediterranean fleet builds (don't see it, Arabia gave up on this long ago) or, as always, Germany and Denmark deciding to fight France. If it is to happen with effect, that needs to happen now. I'm not predicting it, just noting that the productive chances for it are slipping away. France starts getting lots more builds now.

France would be well-advised to sink F Spanish March. He's got a 50-50 shot at Corsica.

Probably a good idea, but it doesn't really matter. If France guesses wrong this year, he'll get it next year

after Spain disbands.

France doesn't really care that much with the advances to finish off Italy. It is still inevitable. It slows down convoys into Africa for one turn possibly.

Well, he might hold Corsica. I'm assuming that France will do Tyn - Tar with two supports from Sal and Spo.

If he holds it, it just puts off the inevitable for a year.

I agree, push the envelope, take the centers, there are plenty of fleets to wrap up, and at best only one Spanish fleet left.

Why even play the game if the most you are aiming for is to be the third most important player in a 3-way alliance? Well, things might loosen up when Byz is forced to disband something.

If Bysantium starts disbanding, he should be able to take Dalmatia, Kiev and Pech within a few years -- unless France lays claim to part of that. And he's well placed to continue against Byzantium, once the latter starts to crack.

I think the German IS the third most important player in the alliance. The way everything has played, I don't think Denmark has signalled ANY willingness to Germany to stab France. Given that, any moves by Germany alone are suicide. I suppose the only question is to see what happens when France approaches a solo, do they stop him then?

Not bad. If he can hold out one more year, the French cavalry should arrive. He can hold Jenne-Jeno by cutting both supports on any attack. So even if he loses Kumbi Saleh or Bassikinu he should stay even (as long as France and Denmark don't scav his dots, and I don't expect them to.)

Yes, things are finally looking up, now that France has decided that it is worth his while to prop Wagadu up.

There is the problem of defending Mauretania, so can Wagadu hang onto their undefended three northern centers? If so, and if the tactical moves Rick suggests keep him going, then Wagadu could even turn the tide in Africa. Sri Vijaya has not been aggressive to come in to help (probably because B. has asked him not to), so the positive Axum outlook over Wagadu is dimming a bit.

WHY? How does this help? Why let the French get into Tripolitania? Is there no coordination between Axum and Byzantium?

I doubt that Byzantium is bothering to talk with Axum, but I don't see why an active diplomat like B. isn't taking the initiative in the conversation.

Clearly Axum and Byzantium didn't talk about this, but no matter, Axum needs to worry about his own home Egyptian centers now. Barca should stay rogue to try to distract units, while steadfastly moving the main French line forward.

Why is he screwing around with a bounce of Mecca?

Also, Indonesia seems to have designs on Menuthien Sea.

True, and that would be catastrophic for Axum.

Did B. really think Damascus was moving to Mecca? It held, of course. Why not an arranged bounce over Mecca with Damascus? And Menuthien Sea falls if Sri Vijaya wants it, and I think he does.

I don't see this ending well for Axum. The attack on Wagadu is going nowhere. Well, he might get lucky and pick up a dot. But the French encroachments on North Africa are too much of a problem in the long run.

Yes, this turn was a complete disaster for Axum. Unless he gets very lucky, Wagadu holds in a decent position.

I don't think that he really saw that coming. But he could easily get squeezed between Wagadu, Indonesia and France. He has been fighting the first two, but he probably didn't see the French peacekeeping forces arriving.

Why didn't he see the French coming? It was clear that was what was needed to take over the Med. Axum now likely gets eliminated entirely, he has no line, no defense, and Wagadu/France/Denmark may not have to fall back to that line.

Well, maybe he shouldn't have bothered with Sicily. I don't quite understand what happened with Tripolitania. But it was the obvious move for the French army in Ifriqya so Byz shouldn't have left Barca undefended.

Byz has had solid tactics, but he's poured nearly half of his forces into the defense of Dalmatia, while his Southern flank is about to be routed. The last two years have not been good. He's being badly outplayed by Nigs.

And I did not expect this, since Gregory is such a great tactician, but he has been too stagnant and Byzantium doesn't seem to be talking to anyone at all. I thought Sicily would be more helpful than it clearly is going to be. He may have to remove it this Winter.

He must really regret not to take up the French olive stick when it was offered, if that was what happened (and it certainly looked that way). Loyalty to Russia has its limits.

Right, I don't think France really needed Byzantium, so maybe it was a VERY temporary olive branch, but now everyone in France's direct path shows a clear elimination possibility. As I said, if there is a real anti-French alliance THIS turn is when to spring it, everyone against France now. If not, the chance will not come again with this much play.

Russia the Placeholder.

What else can he do? He's only surviving thanks to Byzantium. Not even Arabia bothered to support him.

Well, he can take Sam, as I said might be the case after the build season. Somehow nobody moved to Nepal, and that's a bit confusing. Once he takes Sam, his Eastern front will be reasonably solid. At the very least, he should have a frank discussion with China and Indonesia about the futility of trying to break his line faster than the Westies roll the board.

And I don't quite get that. Yes, the Arabian stab of the Samanid went badly, but Matt needs a Plan B and Plan B really should include a more intensive effort to work with Byzantium (and Russia by proxy).

Arabia has too many fronts to be able to do perfectly on all of them. Fortunately, his peace with Axum held up well. He concentrated on the northern and eastern fronts, preferring supporting the move into Sog to moving into Kashmir, although that wasn't really necessary.

Certainly, he should be trying to convince the eastern coalition that they have a common interest in stopping the Westerners, but that appeal could easily fall on deaf ears. France looks very far away from the Chinese perspective, and Lynn could very well consider that stopping France is someone else's problem. Even from Indonesia, France is a very distant menace, although he has already come into contact with the French forces.

The way they are playing, that diplomatic war already has been fought and lost. I think the message that both B. and Matt are hearing from Sri Vijaya and China is: "you two go down unless you organize the west against France", otherwise they can't do anything. Why stop if France just grows while you wait?

And China suffers from his decision to grab as many Samanid dots as possible last year. He cannot hold all of them.

True, but it was his only chance of growing. Indonesia has a choice of options; an all-land China has much more limited possibilities.

I don't see it quite so negatively. Yes, Samarkand likely falls, but as noted, there is no one in Nepal, so China can ensure no progress anywhere else. China has that army that was built so far back that can be removed before it gets a chance to do anything. Of course, Arabia and China locking down just lets France and allies keep coming. I'm sure they're both frustrated.

He's going to be around for a while.

So? Not with any point. Why doesn't India move into Nepal and become part of the action??

So he can put three forces into an attack on Ujj. Which Arabia can support with two supports.

He also seems to want to go after East Africa.

Indonesia appears to continue to pursue the same basic strategy that he's been using since the beginning of the game. He appears to want to try to make incremental tactical gains against Axum and/or Arabia while the Westies roll the board.

Rick is certainly right here. If Indonesia wanted to keep his options even minimally open, there is a lot that he can do.

I do disagree that a largely naval power is handicapped in this variant, as long as there is some mix of armies with the fleets. Indonesia obviously has more possibilities at this point than China does.

Maybe this is why there was the bounce over Mecca.

Indonesia may be trying REALLY hard to split Axum from Arabia, in both directions.

Diplomacy really isn't intended to be played as a plodding tactical game. The tactics are kind of dull, and there are way too many stalemate lines.

Jim has been talking about alternatives. Indonesia could do a lot of different things here. My favorite option for him here is obvious: ally with Arabia. Snap up the last Indian SC and use the resulting builds to cut China in half with Arabian help. Not that he'll do it. But it's certainly a possibility.

Another problem with large global variants is that the alliances tend to develop so much inertia as to become inviolable.

That's true. But it's a tendency that can be overcome; I've seen it happening quite recently in another large variant. It depends very much on the players.

Right, it always depends on the players. I don't see Mike stabbing Lynn, and Lynn can't stab Mike, but Rick's scenario would be more fun than this. It is starting to get tedious, isn't it?

Obviously, no one imagines that France, for example, would vote for the draw. But it's a call for action, a proclamation that all of these powers have a common interest in limiting the French advance. The odds that most of these players will take this call seriously are absolutely null.

Fall and Autumn 909 Results

The Fall 909 season has been adjudicated. I need to stop going on dates on an adjudication night, because all three times that I have done it recently, I've had comically terrible dates that ended very early. The Diplomacy Gods must really want everyone to know the results in a timely fashion.

The late player was Denmark. This is Trout's first NMR. He partially made up for his error with some amusing orders for his holding fleets (I particularly appreciated the Moby Dick reference, as I am currently reading that). Generally speaking, let's make sure to send in prelims, and get orders in on time, so that this game is not delayed and does not risk losing momentum.

Andy will probably wish the results were delayed, as this season is the last one for Immortal India. It was amazing to hold on as long as you did, and it is much appreciated that you continued to put in effort and remain active in the game long after your position became hopeless. The other minnows all managed to hold on for another year, although Umayyid is pushed to the edge with only 1 SC remaining in Corsica.

The huge news this season is that we have a new leader: the West Frankish Kingdom, whom gained four supply centers this year to reach a total of 21. It will be interesting to see what they do with those 4 potential builds. The French gains came at the expense of Byzantium and Wagadu. This news was probably greeted with even bigger cheers in Axum than in Paris, as Wagadu's defense will be fatally undermined in the African war following Wagadu's 2 disbands this winter. Staying with Axum, some misdirection and some nice cooperation with Sri Vijaya led to the destruction of the Arabian fleet in the Arabian Sea, leaving Arabia with no seagoing fleets. Arabia looks to be suffering to some degree from "early leader syndrome", as Axum, Sri Vijaya, Tang Dynasty, West Frankish Kingdom, and Turan all took anti-Arab measures this year.

By the way, the draw failed, with some vociferous "no" votes against. Before the adjudication, we have some press, both with a tragic tone.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

This cruel war carries us a thousand miles from home,

[illegible]

Retreat Possibilities

Arabian F ArS is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Indian A Var can retreat to Nep, Pal or disband
Wagadu A Aga can retreat to Sij, Tir or disband
Wagadu A JeJ can retreat to Tir or disband

Autumn 909 Retreats

A Jenne-Juno retreats to Tiraqqa
A Agades retreats to Sjiilmassa

Adjustments

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) builds 2 units, can build in Ard, Arm, Aze, Bag, Geo, Ghu, Her, Isf, Jer, Tam
Byzantine Empire disbands 1 unit
Tang Empire (China) makes no adjustments
Kingdom of Denmark makes no adjustments
Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) makes no adjustments
West Frankish Kingdom (France) builds 4 units, can build in Aqt, Bri, Cor, Dub, Gas, LBU, Lot, Pam, Par, Rom (ec), Rom, Ros, Rom (wc), Sal, Sar, Swa
East Frankish Kingdom (German) makes no adjustments
Pratihara Kingdom (India) makes no adjustments
Khaganate of Khazaria makes no adjustments
Principality of Kiev (Russia) makes no adjustments
Umayyad Emirate (Spain) disbands 1 unit
Samanid Emirate (Turan) makes no adjustments
Kingdom of Sri Vijaya builds 1 unit, can build in But, Cah, Cho, Jam, Kal, Kam, Plm, Ser
Kingdom of Wagadu disbands 2 units
Kingdom of Axum makes no adjustments
Neutral makes no adjustments

Position Power Abb 908 909 Change SCs changing possession

1 West Frankish Kingdom (France) F 17 21 +4 +Bar, +Cad, +Mau, +Tar
2 Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) A 20 20 0
3 Kingdom of Sri Vijaya V 11 12 +1 +Var
4 Kingdom of Axum X 12 12 0
5 Tang Empire (China) C 9 9 0
6 Kingdom of Denmark D 9 9 0
7 Byzantine Empire B 9 8 -1 -Bar, +Scl, -Tar
8 East Frankish Kingdom (German) G 7 7 0
9 Kingdom of Wagadu W 6 4 -2 -Cad, -Mau
10 Principality of Kiev (Russia) R 2 2 0
11 Samanid Emirate (Turan) T 2 2 0
12 Umayyad Emirate (Spain) S 2 1 -1 -Scl
13 Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) E 0 0 0
14 Pratihara Kingdom (India) I 1 0 -1 -Var
15 Khaganate of Khazaria K 0 0 0

Fall and Autumn 909 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

One general comment : This game is getting more and more interrelated -- and more and more complex, in the process.

OK, so I'm going to start with the analysis of the moves and then the summary of where everyone is down with the center counts. As I hinted last time, the Chinese couldn't hold Samarkand for sure, so would probably move out of it to try to sit on a line. Note how much better this would have worked with a build in hand, since Arabia chose not to move in/attack it. More on that with the Arabian orders below. Otherwise, the Chinese didn't

do much this turn. Two units are just sitting holding as a warning (presumably) to Sri Vijaya not to stab. Note that Sri Vijaya is not doing likewise. Also note that the two holding units are each three moves (a game year and a half) away from the open and undefended Sri Vijayan centers. Not much is happening here.

China is back to pure defensive moves, the cerise on the icing the supported move out of Samarkand, which didn't even prove remotely necessary.

The army in Tibet, which could have moved into

Nepal to fill in the empty spot with little risk, supported Uyg instead.

Completely agreed that China would be better off if he had waived a build; I believe that we all mentioned that at the time. Waiving builds is an **active technique.**

Apparently China really wanted to hold the line at Qar? I don't quite get where this is going.

I think it's very unlikely that China could make significant headway moving West from his current line.

So what happened here? Was India supposed to have moved into Nepal LAST time, and didn't? Possibly. It doesn't really matter, as long as India was active and useful, he lived, as soon as he was behind the line, he was dead. No surprises there. White Wolves are supposed to be up with the Yeti in the Himalayas! Now they are ghosts in the game. Andy hasn't been a real player in this game, in the sense of deciding the outcome, for some time.

The Indian survival was a phenomenon, but it depended entirely on the fact that India was in the center of unresolved conflicts. Once the conflicts were resolved, there was no further use for India's ghost to keep a dot that Indonesia wanted, and Indonesia is the active part of the eastern Juggernaut.

This tends to be the fate of small powers who are no longer on the front line. An old adage says "why should I have a lackey when I could have his dots?"

Sri Vijaya keeps moving forward, we do have questions about what actually happened though. Mike had three key places where he could have moved forward, the first was a choice: he could be annihilating Arabian Sea working with Axum, or stabbing Axum by moving to Menuthian Sea. He chose to work with Axum, put B. in Arabian Sea, and set up to be able to turn corners in India (though he still needed to get a unit in Nepal, which he didn't do). Instead, he took out India and can put his own unit in Nepal in the Spring. Third, he could have tried to move into the Atlantic, where instead he moved another fleet forward and set a line. Interestingly, taking out India required complicit holding with support from Arabia, who was being stabbed in the Arabian Sea, but Mike got the stability from Arabia that he sought. As did his ally China.

Perhaps the first question is : why the Indonesian - Axum stab of Arabia?

I don't see that Axum had great interest in eliminating Arabia's last fleet, especially as it seemed that Arabia had offered to convoy his Basra

army to Africa, with B's help, apparently either to recuperate Zim or to assist against Wagadu. (Since it never happened, it is any body's guess as to what was planned.) But Indonesia was seriously threatening the Menuthian Sea, which would have been a disaster for Axum. Perhaps B., always an active and innovative diplomat, may have come up with a new vision of the southwest Asia and African situation, which saved his own position and gave Indonesia a new role in the defense against the westerners, at Arabia's expense. Arabia was certainly the first surprised by this switch, which explains his relative passivity of Arabia during Indonesia's final stab of India.

That's only one possible interpretation. Certainly many others are possible. But it was obvious that there were at least two sets of plans in place, and Indonesia's plans won out.

If Indonesia imagined that Wagadu would move out of the South Ocean Sea, he certainly would have moved in to fill the place. But lacking omniscience, he moved so as to be able to force his way in next season.

It seems that Indonesia is working with Axum as well as China now. I can see the appeal of this move for Indonesia. He's got an open path to move West and, once Axum is completely out of position, he'll stab hard. What else is he going to do? Is Mr. Fleet Power going to go after the one coastal SC in West Africa? Or is his just going to continue to foster discord between Axum and Arabia while taking advantage of it.

Well, there are some gains to be made in India.

OK, so what did Arabia do, except look like he is in greater trouble yet. This time, he DID move to Mecca, and B. did not self-bounce, nor bounce the move by Arabia. But unless I missed something in the orders above, NO ONE else moved. Some people tried to move, but all other attempts at moving bounced. The attempt at support to Vyaticchia kept the stagnant Samanid in the game, but the Samanid did not try to help. Arabia is seemingly now completely without allies, very bad in the long term. This could be the high water mark of the Arabians. More on the builds below, but on the good side, with two annihilations this year, Matt gets two builds to change his luck.

It looks as though Arabia's attention was almost entirely turned towards the conquering western forces, quite rightly. He didn't press his advantage against China, but instead concentrated on gaining the last two Samanid dots. He tried to take Bas, which was saved by the French army in Yuga, and he desperately tried to move into Vya, to keep Bulgar out of western hands. None of that worked very well, and it kept him from taking

Samarkand, from which China had so rapidly retreated.

In the southwest, he and Axum had apparently planned a convoy of his Basra army to Africa. But B., who saw the possibility of his position collapsing, had to find an alternative plan. Perhaps the move to Mecca was a part of the Arabian-Axum plan: the idea may have been to convoy the army to Africa the following year.

Too many interpretations are possible here; we can only guess at what was supposed to happen.

Are the Easties really going to try to take Arabia down? Or was the dislodge part of a plan to get either another friendly fleet on the Med or another army that could man the line in the West?

If the Easties do open a full-blown offensive against Arabia, isn't there plenty of incentive for Arabia to work with France against Byzantium and Axum? Arabia is far too large to go down quickly or neatly. Even though Arabia appears to be without allies, a power this large doesn't go down by letting himself be neatly carved into pieces of equal size.

Axum could be preparing to try to oppose France more directly later, but backed off from doing so right now. Instead, B. backed off and let France establish the forward line at Barca. He also didn't challenge Mauretania and let France walk in. France could legitimately claim he was trying to protect it for Wagadu, but the outcome was still bad. And he also guessed right around the Wagadu home centers, for the most part. This only kept him even though. And he let Arabia into Mecca while advancing toward Basra. I think that will be a spring guessing game to get into Basra with advancing in India, if he is still working with Sri Vijaya. But fleets cannot advance further. B. really needed the army build to convoy an army into Basra, he really doesn't want to convoy a Sri Vijayan army in.

It still looks as though Axum and Arabia had originally planned to let Arabia provide some armies of reinforcement in Africa, but that B. had to imagine an alternative plan at lightning speed, without bothering to fit in all the details as to what would happen next. He needed to avoid letting his position collapse entirely under Indonesian pressure; that was the first priority, above any other geopolitical considerations. Once he and Indonesia agreed to stab Arabia and destroy the remaining Arabian fleet, B tried to move his armies to preserve his centers from any Arabian reactions. It is also possible that he negotiated with Arabia while planning to stab him, of course. But I don't see what the stab did for him, it really looks as though it was purely to deal with Indonesia.

Axum kept up his campaign against Wagadu, rather successfully, but let the French establish their beachhead in North Africa unopposed.

Axum doesn't seem to have a long-term strategic plan. Every two moves, he tries something different. The good news for Axum is that France has stabbed Wagadu, which will open up those centers for the short term. The bad news is that it will only be the short term.

It's hard for me to imagine why he's going along with the plan to sink the Arabian fleet. Arabia could rebuild an army or fleet in Jerusalem and march on Alexandria immediately.

Can Wagadu make up with anyone? Probably not. So his choice is whether to try as best he can to stop B., as he has done for some time, or turn on France and give up everything to B. The retreats were to the only places they could go to stay on the board to maximize the uncertainty going into the builds. One or the other of these two units almost surely goes off the board and signals which Mikael is doing. But ALWAYS give yourself the negotiation choice. Mikael did the right thing.

Wagadu has to make up with one side or the other, in the sense that he cannot afford to fight on both fronts. The French stabs really hurt; but France is perhaps not interested in going further, except possibly the Canaries. Axum will certainly keep going, if he can, until all the Wagadu centers are his, Wagadu can of course turn against France, but can he really do anything to stop him? He can, perhaps, defend his centers against Axum, or at least that looks more do-able.

Wagadu is dead in the near future. The loss of two SCs to France leaves him with only four forces. Axum outnumbers him in the homeland. Walata and Kumbi Saleh cannot be held, Tkanaren is swinging in the wind, and that leaves only Awlil as his last SC at a mini-stalemate point. He may stick around for a while like India did, but he's basically dead.

Byzantium was not totally impotent, but NO units moved and now he must remove one. He moved into Sicily in the spring, and gets to keep it, but France didn't even challenge him, since it doesn't matter, it cannot be held.

More of the same. Byzantium badly needs a diplomatic shake-up. Holding the fort alone with a dying Russian is a losing proposition, even if he can hold out for a long while. Why does he not join forces with Arabia, or try to split up the western alliance, or both? Even if he doesn't take the diplomatic initiative, why doesn't Arabia try to join forces with Byzantium? I somehow doubt that the diplomatic situation will change much, even though it's hare do see why not.

It seems to me that Byzantium is going to lose control of the Med to France. I would not have believed this possible a few years ago, when France had no fleets in the Med at all, and both Spain and Byzantium had plenty of fleets. He's going to look back and ask himself why he convoyed that army off the boot. The loss of that one force opened the door to French control of the boot.

If Arabia cannot help him, the long-term prognosis here is not good. The lesson here is that manning the stalemate lines often is not rewarded by the other players.

Nathan survives, but only because France didn't even care to guess. All France really wanted to do was to keep Byzantium out of the Tyrrhenian Sea and to make sure Ifriqiya stayed French. One of these units goes this Winter, and the other one is easy pickings next game year.

Agree entirely with Jim here.

Spain is out next year.

In a season when hardly anyone was able to move units, France moved eight, and picked up four builds. The Atlantic is a bit of a mess now, was Denmark also supposed to take Tkanaren? It will be a bit of a dance to get fleets back where they are wanted in the next game year. But there are no serious challenges anywhere else. And with four builds, France can signal a whole lot about where he is going next, but more on Nigs' choices below.

I can't help being surprised at how casually Nigs stabbed Wagadu. Not that Wagadu was a major ally, but it's a bad signal for Denmark and Germany, if they are still up to taking note of signals.

Is that as far as Nigs wanted to go in Africa? Possibly; fighting over the rest may be more trouble than it's worth. But if Mikael is willing to "overlook" the French stabs, France could help him hold up, if only to delay the Axum-Indonesian advance.

Still for France, more than for any other power, the question of where to go from here is important. He has finally become board leader, but 21 centers is still less than half of what he needs for a solo. After he casually grabbed what he could from Wagadu, maybe his two main allies will be more careful. Or maybe not. slowly but surely, he can take most of the Byzantine centers. He can also take most of the German centers easily, but Germany is useful in putting pressure on Byzantium; so that may wait until Byzantium is considerably weakened. But even with all of the Byzantine and German centers and part of Denmark, he is still quite short. The question is, will the various eastern and central powers nibble

away at Arabia, or will they join together to find a line they can hold?

France chooses Wagadu as his next victim. Nigs appears to be running circles around everybody else on his side of the board.

The Chaos builds rules allow him to build a fleet in Sardinia in addition to whatever else he wants.

Apparently he didn't inform his Danish ally that he was selling out Wagadu. Oh well.

I still think he would have been well-advised to get more armies into Africa. I don't see how getting two builds from Wagadu really helps him. It's not like he has a shortage of forces. The stab of Wagadu makes me think he's not really all that serious about extending the influence of his alliance into the other areas of the board.

Germany was another one of the powers that didn't move and just awaits the Byzantium removal. If the removal comes on the German front, Germany advances, otherwise, it waits one more year for more removals.

What did Rick call Russia? Placeholder? That is what Germany has become, too. He will live as long as he is useful to France, no longer.

I have disliked the German position for quite some time. "Taking up space" is not a winning strategy.

Denmark appeared to lack some coordination about the Sea of Worms, it isn't clear if Former Trout even knows why it is there? But otherwise, they move forward, fail to knock out any Russian or Samanid centers, but are ready to pounce when the opportunities start calling.

I still don't see why Denmark brought his fleet there. Surely he has no more illusions about France's loyalty towards allies. But in Asia, he serves a useful purpose, and can perhaps find goals of his own.

You would think Denmark would have no illusions about France's loyalty. I think you would be wrong.

The only way this game is going to become really interesting is if Germany and/or Denmark do something to curb French growth. This kind of extended lackey play is less than I want to see in a demo game.

Just waiting until Byzantium decides to remove supporting units. I do not think that happens this year.

Agreed.

He also needs support from the Arabians.

And the Samanid don't even bother to try anything.

Samanid doesn't really have much left to try. His best strategy may be to let the Arabia and the western alliance fight over his two centers. No one seems to be offering him anything.

Whatever.

Four builds, eh? Well, one should be a fleet in either Dublin or Brittany to come to North Ocean Sea. I'm not sure if Denmark is really as bored as those orders seem (I suspect yes), but will he take offense at builds that could be threatening? I don't think so, but he could. Germany has little to no choice. France could start moving on German centers this game year without threatening the long term stability of his power, but I do not expect him to (we will know if an army is built in France proper). Next big choice to watch is "fleet or army for Sardinia", he has to build there, but fleet focuses on Byzantium and the Med., army charges into Africa. Then, Cordova should be an army just in case Spain tries to keep the homeland Spanish March fleet instead of Corsica. After that, Barca is not threatened, another couple of centers even if Germany is not stabbed are nearly guaranteed and no sign of anyone stopping France. For one thing, if France is the only one with moving units, it's pretty tough for anyone else.

France will build a fleet in Sardinia. Aside from that, I have to think that the decision to grab so many builds means that he's going to stab one of his main two allies.

At some point, this sham of an alliance he has with Denmark and Germany is going to have to fall apart.

Arabia has two builds and a lot of choices. Do we finally get that fleet Jerusalem? Why not, I say? But the other unit probably needs to back up Basra. I think Arabia will do well to stay at 20 in the coming game year.

I don't understand why he didn't take Samarkand. But the rebuilds should be helpful. Either a fleet or army in Jerusalem lets him put pressure on Alexandria. I would think the second build would be an army in Baghdad.

The last few years have not seen much creativity from our Arabian player. After he dominated the early stage of the game, his recent efforts have been relatively unsuccessful.

I am hoping to see Arabia try out new ideas if Axum is serious about attacking him.

Hey, a build. Chola and an army are likely, essentially to replace the Indian army. But could build somewhere else. I would be surprised if Mike built in a way that he signaled any worry about Lynn.

Yes, an army build to move into India.

Having a reliable ally is a real advantage in this game. I would say that the Sris have the second-best position on the board.

Axum did well to stay even and faces the choice of Sri Vijaya vs. Arabia. This time I think the alliance with Sri Vijaya will stick.

I think it will stick, until it fails. The only reason it would stick over the long term is if Axum is needed to prevent a French solo. It's not yet clear to me that this will happen.

Not much for Lynn to do, but he must hang in there and see if he can move forward once an army is in Nepal. You can look at it as a horrible mistake not to withhold the build last time, that could have been built on the front this year. But Matt may have let Lynn keep Samarkand precisely because Lynn couldn't build there.

It doesn't really matter all that much.

There might be a big battle in Central Asia, but the way the terrain is laid out, right now Arabia has many forces defending relatively few SCs. So even if China gets a couple, it's not like he'd get West of the Caspian at any point.

Denmark should start to have something to do this game year, with the lone fleet or in Russia, but not much to do.

Denmark ought to turn on France now. He and Germany are essentially blocked in Russia.

At some point, somebody needs to tell these guys Diplomacy is _not_ a team game.

The theory appears to be "bring as much force as possible and something good might happen". But it's really not helping much.

Denmark might snag Bulgar next year, but really - so what? He'd be better off snagging Dublin and Rostov and moving the fleet down to take Lot. Of course, with France getting FOUR BUILDS that probably won't be possible.

OK, what does Byzantium remove. One approach is to remove F Sicily. The line inland then keeps holding and French fleets have to maneuver to take Sicily. But probably one of the fleets keeps Byzantium alive the longest. But he is not surviving this unless he turns everyone else against France. How can he fight France alone?

He can't, not really.

I would not remove F Sic. He's going to need all four fleets to not be routed by the French navy. I think the time has come for a strategic retreat. Which

means removing A Dalmatia. Byz has five armies in the Balkans, but they control only two SCs. That's a bad force/SC ratio. He needs to get his forces into the areas with more SCs.

But he really needs to get somebody to fight France in Africa. That might be Axum or it might be Arabia.

Or he could convince Denmark and Germany to turn on France. That's the move that all three of them should do.

Little choice but to go forward, can't stab France without Denmark.

Suicide is painless.

Choices here too. I think he will suck it up and keep attacking B.

Wagadu is toast.

Nothing at all to say of importance.

None of these guys are doing anything.

Even MORE the case for Samanid, if you're not going to play, John R. might as well have kept the units NOT in the centers.

Possibly slightly interesting to keep Spanish March, but will keep Corsica.

Bye, Andy!

Shouldn't he be listed ahead of Egypt?

I hope this game loosens up a bit. As a demo game, it's not provided the observer with a good variety of alliance possibilities.

(Quite seriously, why join a demo game if all you're going to do is sit in a big alliance that is going nowhere while your ally grows by leaps and bounds by stabbing his other "allies". Germany and Denmark are going to get the booby prize if they continue to play this way.)

Winter 909 Results

The Winter 909 season has been adjudicated. I never received orders from 2 players: Arabia and Wagadu. For Arabia, he had 2 builds, so these are waived. For Wagadu, he had 2 disbands, and so I had to determine which units to remove.

Before I describe the system to determine this, I want to urge everybody to pay greater attention to the game. We have had 3 missed order sets in the last 2 deadlines. These are all normally reliable players, and so I'm concerned that the game has lost some momentum; however, missed deadlines will only exacerbate the problem. It is only fair to the other players and David to continue putting in a full effort for the integrity of the game and the gametest. Please, let's try harder to get orders in on time.

Now I will describe the system that I use to determine which units are removed. Here are the units to keep from highest to lowest priority:

- 1) any unit in a home SC (if tied, skip to #4)
- 2) any unit in a neutral SC (if tied, skip to #5)
- 3) if no units in an SC, the unit that is minimum tempi from a home SC (or a neutral SC, if no home SCs, and skip to #5 if tied)
- 4) if tied from #3, unit that is minimum tempi from the next closest home SC (exhaust all home SCs)
- 5) if still tied from #4, unit that is minimum tempi from the next closest neutral SC (exhaust all neutral SCs)
- 6) if still tied from #5, alphabetical order (keep A, disband Z)

In this game, we only have home SCs, so the neutral/home distinction is not relevant. First, Wagadu keeps Awl, Kus, and Wal (all in SCs). Sij and Tir are both 1 tempi from an SC (Wal), while Jel is 2 tempi, so Jel is removed. Both Sij and Tir are 2 tempi from the next closest SC (KuS). The third SC is Awl, and Sij is 2 tempi away, while Tir is 4 tempi. Therefore, Sij is kept, and Tir is removed.

Adjustment Adjudications

Byzantine Empire Disbands A Ava

Kingdom of Sri Vijaya Builds A Cho

Kingdom of Wagadu Disbands A Tir

Kingdom of Wagadu Disbands F Jel

Umayyad Emirate (Spain) Disbands F SpM

West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds A Ros

West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F LBU

West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Sar

Winter 909 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

I don't have much to say here, except that the Arabian NMR is discouraging. France continues to feed the premise of wanting to continue to work with Denmark and Germany.

In this sense, this game is not holding up its end of the bargain from the players. It can be difficult with these large variants that go on for a long time to keep focus, but so far this really isn't that long a game. We for Diplomacy World must apologize for this, but use it as an opportunity to remind everyone that "all things are within the game". If you don't take into account all the information your senses make available to you on your fellow players, you aren't playing Diplomacy to its full potential. In other words, anticipate and take advantages of lapses in concentration. They are part of the game, we're human and not machines.

This is probably the best choice, mostly because Kiev/Russia takes it on the chin first for the choice. The Byzantines have to try to stop France from coming through Sicily as best they can. Not convincing Arabia to build something, especially F Jerusalem, though is very damaging.

Agreed that this was the best choice. Byzantium is concentrating on blocking the Med, which is important.

I sincerely doubt that Byzantium has been even talking to Arabia, unfortunately. Not that you can ever convince another player to send in his orders, really.

This illustrates that placing armies in India, and fighting Arabia remains the focus and Cho is there. But the

tactics here are tight and even with Arabia missing the builds, the way forward is slow.

Indonesian can't build another fleet anywhere useful; and there is no sign that he is even considering changing the eastern alliance structure.

As Rick said in the last turn, Wagadu is walking dead now, but please, please Mikael, at least move the units and play it out! These would probably not be what I would have removed, not sure what he would have removed.

It looks as though Wagadu was still stunned by France's center grab. There are no good disbands here, in any case.

Spain's removal is unsurprising, but doesn't matter much.

True, France has covered whatever Spain will keep.

Note the French restraint here. A Rostow pushes forward into Russia as Vyatichia takes Bulgar in Spring and Rostow comes up to Vyatichia. The fleets further guarantee ownership of the Med (amazingly quickly eliminating all other fleets and getting to all the coastal centers, I think). And then a build is waived as defense if anyone attacks. Brilliant, though I might even have waived two.

Good solid builds. If France is planning to stab anyone, he's not showing his hand. I'd guess that he won't stab until he has control of the Med and nowhere else evident to go.

Spring/Summer 910 Results

The Spring 910 season has been adjudicated. Only one order is needed for the Retreat season, from Wagadu. Because there is only one possible retreat, I have gone ahead and adjudicated this, although Mikael could choose to retreat OTB instead.

Looking at the game, the most interesting area of action right now is the Eastern Med, where the West Franks, Byzantines, Axum, and Arabia are all involved in a newly emerging conflict. In the Western Med, Nathan's brave stand appears to have reached its conclusion, with the lone remaining Umayyid fleet on Corsica clearly doomed this fall. After the West Frankish stab last fall, the collapse is swift for Wagadu, who seems certain to be reduced to 1 SC after having

6 last year. On the Eastern European steepes, the rainbow kaleidoscope of chaos including armies from 7 powers saw little change, with no SCs changing hands. Concluding in Asia, the Tang-Srijivaya juggernaut has moved their armies across the vertical India-Himalayan-Siberian axis, and they look primed to now start making progress against Arabia.

Before the adjudication, we have another press submission from Li Bo, and we also have some creative holding orders within the adjudication itself (I must admit, I am far too amused by these!).

[illegible][illegible]

Spring/Summer 910 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

For Arabia, things go bad West, East, North and South.

West: Arabia moves an army to Jerusalem, which does border Alexandria, but he really needed the fleet, and it is not clear what Matt is going to do from there. If he is to influence the war in the Eastern Med he needs to find a way to extricate himself from Jerusalem and build a fleet there, if he does indeed end up with one after fall.

East: He also laments the fate of Ujj. The forces arrayed against Arabia decided to set up to take centers in the fall, the future for Ujj gets worse as that front is not stable for Arabia.

North: The northern front is not stable either, as France got into Vyatichia and now dominoes start crumbling in the north too. This could be even worse for Arabia if China and the French allies cooperate tacitly to agree where to focus, or worse yet actually work together to collapse the Northern Front.

South: Lastly, the Arabian homeland is under threat with Basra being a VERY weak wall. This turn, Basra is probably safe as Ujj will be taken down first, but then there is little Arabia can do being surrounded on four sides. Matt has a lot of units, but they can go very quickly. On the negotiation front, one wonders if Arabia can make a deal with the Jerusalem unit to help Axum in return for backing off, since again France is the real threat. This is not what is happening though. East and west are firmly allied internally and working hard to mop everyone else up. Just six powers will be left after the carnage and Arabia will not be one of them.

What makes you think that? You see the two eastern powers, the three of the western alliance and Axum? That could be, but nothing is less certain. As the western powers advance (as long as there are still three of them, which may not last), maybe some of the other central players will wake up to the threat. And Axum could be badly placed, once again.

But for the moment, this is not Arabia's day. The failure to send in adjustments was especially costly at this point in the game. He used to be surrounded by allies, clients, and relatively easy prey; now he is surrounded by hungry wolves. The only way to turn this around is diplomatically. If nothing else will work, he can show that concentrating on him will only help the Westerners, and especially France, advance. That may not weigh in much with the eastern Juggernaut, but it should be effective elsewhere.

Notice, btw, that he has finally started supporting Russia.

I'm wondering what it would take for Arabia to throw in with France. It's the obvious thing to do, if Axum/Indonesia/China insist on continuing to attack him. You say "congratulations, guys, you've taken a half-dozen Asian centers. Now France is unstoppable."

BTW, I hate trying to figure out the movements from these province abbreviations. Using three-letter abbreviations just does not help us at all. Not when there are so many provinces on the board, many of which have similar names, and at least half of which have names that are archaic and no longer in use.

Axum is working to get as much of Wagadu as possible, and Wagadu will surely be down to just the one center after the fall. France is making headway into the Axum Egyptian centers and defending this should be the priority, unless with Sri Vijaya they think that the Atlantic defenses are weak. But if that were the case, you would have thought that a firmer battle aimed at Awlii would take place. Since then next year Axum could start building fleets there. But instead, France sits in the Western Sea unmolested. More on this front below. I think that if B. is calculating that France will use the fleets primarily to take over the Mediterranean first, that he has time to take out Wagadu and build there. But he has already lost Alexandria and can drop into Al-Qa. even if in so doing he gives up Alexandria. And what if Arabia decides to jump in with the French as well? This also is possible. We do not know what Jerusalem is going to do in the fall.

Whatever the reasons for Axum's stab of Arabia last season, he seems to be sticking to it. Odd, if he wanted to go for Arabia's weak points, he would have done better continuing when he had the clear upper hand, a few years ago. He and Arabia made up quickly; and after all he didn't gain much in the affair. Now he is much less well-placed to continue -- and his fight with Wagadu helped France gain ground in Northern Africa and the Med.

I really don't understand why the move to Mecca. Mecca wasn't a big deal, but he dashed in after Arabia and let the French army into Alexandria unhindered. That could be an enormous mistake. Alexandria is a key spot in this variant, especially for a power strong enough to invest a build into opening the canal. If France will be able threaten the Red Sea as well as the Mediterranean, Axum is very badly off indeed.

And, as Jim-Bob points out, if Axum refuses to deal with Arabia, France might be glad to do so. Although that seems a bit doubtful, given the role that Arabia is playing in the north. France likes his allies to be absolutely loyal and trusting; hard to see Arabia in that role.

Axum has consistently been making opportunistic decisions that ignore any concerns about long-term strategy. Yes, he will get a handful of SCs from Wagadu. Meanwhile, France has broken through in the Med and will soon be able to hit Byz from the Southwest. Also, if France and Arabia cooperate at all, Axum is in deep trouble.

As usual, these are good tactical moves, but seem bereft of a diplomatic backstory. The Byzantines should have been making sure Arabia built that fleet Jerusalem and came to help. Now the Arabian role is unclear and as long as France can take its fleets forward along the North African coast, the Byzantines are outflanked. Sicily could fall this fall, note that Gregory chose not to defend it, probably feeling it lost. But France played for position and can still take it this fall. What do the Byzantines remove???

Lack of diplomatic outreach has been Byzantine's problem from the beginning, and still is. However, you can't blame Byzantium for Arabia's failure to send in adjustments. Whatever the players agree to, the order still has to be sent in.

Anyhow, he seems determined to defend his part of the Med tooth and claw. The move out of Sicily might have been to create a guessing game : will he make a supported attack on Barca, or defend Sicily? However, France brought enough forces in to defend Barca in any case.

Yeah, but if he defends Barca he cannot do anything more interesting with the army in Alexandria. And it's not like he's hurting for units.

Back to Byz - he's getting beaten back, and it'll get worse when France slides another fleet onto the Adriatic.

Lynn continues to make slow and steady progress, Arabia will go down eventually, but it will be quite awhile before China gains many centers over it. Sometime soon, China has to get worried about the French outpost in Yugra. It is not clear that he'll ever be able to dislodge it, even if he eventually reaches the Khazar Sea in three or four game years. China is not benefitting from the fact that Arabia has NOT pulled out of Central Asia to defend the homeland.

I suspect that China broke some promises to Arabia that he made to get Arabia to stab Samanid.

The Eastern juggernaut is advancing, slowly but surely -- but it is the Indonesians who are doing the advancing. China managed to recuperate Samarkand, finally; but it's hard to see where else he could make gains.

France is treating the Danes much better than his other ally, the Germans. Once they don't need the Germans it is difficult to see how the French and Danes will not crush him. But still the Germans are needed for the slow and steady drumbeat to take out Byzantium and Kiev. Note, though, that France hands the Danish Tka, so Denmark will get a build this year.

True, but Denmark seems more bored than ever! Interesting to compare the three members of the Western alliance. France advances regularly, always finding new ground to move in, extremely fluid. Denmark is barely moving, but will advance slowly in northern Asia. Germany is standing still. He still occupies a key space, but once the Byzantines weaken enough, he doesn't serve any purpose in the alliance any more.

Yay! France took the Canary islands!

I have nothing new to say about the uselessness of the Danish strategy.

More quiet efficiency, France is already in Alexandria! He may not hold it right now, but that doesn't matter (since if knocked out he can retreat into another center). I am slightly worried whether France has enough fleets in the Atlantic to form the line there, but with an easy build in Cadiz in the fall, this is really minor. You have to stretch to look for wrinkles in the French plan. Nigs is still not threatened anywhere. There is a small question of French/Arabian relations. One expects that they had a "you go your way, I'll go mine" moment earlier in the game and France doesn't need Arabia, but boy, if Arabia jumped this turn, all sorts of centers would fall.

Remember a few years back, when it seemed that France would never have enough fleets to make any inroads into the Med and its rich mine of centers? And now, it seems evident that France will soon call the Mediterranean his own. Not to mention what he could do with Alexandria, once he could open up the canal.

What made the difference? Certainly, Spain's weakness helped. So did the Axum-Wagadu war, and Wagadu's dependence on France. (That was good for Denmark, too, as he happened to have fleets that could help at a crucial moment.)

The difference was made when Byzantium was tricked into moving his army off the Italian peninsula. Also, the French were allowed to walk armies down the Northern

coast of Africa.

Poor Germany fails to move again. The way is going to open up soon, but will the Danes and French let Germany get any more builds at all? I would bet against it. They may need to get into Avaria to break the line, which I sort of expected this turn, but the movement here is SO slow that it does not benefit Germany regardless. This is a danger of the big variants. The line is "helpful" sure, but no one really is beholden to you over it.

Fully agreed. Germany had to take advantage of his position in northern Byzantine more actively, if he was going to have a real role to play in the game.

Yuk.

There wasn't much Russia could do, but the enemy forces are now surrounding him, and the end is near. They are making good tactical moves, so the enemy may need to advance into Avaria to break it, but eventually this will happen, if for no other reason that Byzantium is going to keep losing centers in the Med.

Agreed. I still think that Russia was out of luck in this game. The support from Arabia wasn't really needed this turn., but it could be important very soon. Byzantium ought to be motivated to making sure that Arabia survives.

You mean "Russia survives", yes?

Nothing exciting from the Samanid, they survive until the line starts to move, then they're gone.

Agreed.

Spain is dead as a door nail, dead as a coffin nail.

Absolutely.

The immobile powers waiting to die do not interest me.

Relentlessly moving forward, set up to take Ujj soon. But will it be enough? And can Sri Vijaya get anywhere in the Atlantic. There is a glimmer of hope here, but it probably already is closing with more French builds in the fall.

Indonesia is not only moving tactically, but even diplomatically -- something that the eastern pair hadn't bothered to do before. He has set up an alliance with Axum -- maybe at gunpoint, but nevertheless, one which works.

However, even that seems to help the French to advance.

Indonesia has found a new wall to bang his head against. It's hard to see him move any further. There's not enough room here to blast through.

On the Indian front, he can make gains against Arabia, now that Axum has turned on his former ally. What then?

Yes, well, the F Awl is still on the board, if Mikael chooses to keep it. I wouldn't be surprised if he keeps an army and tries to sneak behind Axum's lines. Tahert to Zawlia will probably work if he tries it.

Whatever. Wagadu is living on borrowed time. He'll outlive Spain, maybe even one or two of the other condemned powers. But his days are numbered.

F Awl is on a mini-stalemate line. I think it would be more interesting to keep it. But not by that much.

Fall/Autumn 910 Results

The Fall 910 season has been adjudicated. The end has arrived for both the Samanid and Umayyid Emirates. Both players played well and had nice starts to the game, and the press war between the West Franks and Umayyids was possibly the most memorable that I've been witness to. Thanks for playing guys, and I look forward to our paths crossing again.

That brings us down to 12 players. Starting in Africa with the most likely player to join Nathan and John, Mikael's Wagadu is down to 2 SCs, and could be down to 1 depending on the West Frankish retreat. The West Franks and Srivijayans made their first contact of the game, with Sri Vijaya knocking the French out of the Western Sea. With the war against Wagadu finished, it remains to be seen where (and if) the Axum armies will redeploy. With the Western Med cleared up now, the naval war in the Med between the

West Franks and Byzantines will probably intensify now. Looking in the Eastern Med, the West Franks have foreshadowed the Crusades by landing an army in Jerusalem.

After the miscue in the winter, the year went relatively okay for Arabia, who lost 2 SCs (Jerusalem and Ujjain), but offset that with a gain in Tibet. With the 2 builds in hand and the fleet in Ujjain destroyed, Arabia will still have two builds to use to try to hold off the infidels. The situation on the Russian steppes is more resolved with the elimination of Turan, and now the combined Danish-West Frankish-East Frankish forces seem to maybe have the upper hand.

Before the adjudication, we have some press, with my favorite Li Bo poem. Also, be sure to check out some of the creative orders within the adjudication (from Arabia, Denmark, and Axum).

[illegible]

Beyond the gates, the hills
groan under the enemy's steps.
The hawk circles, indifferent
to the spectacle of Man.
Dust and sweat, striving and
sacrifice, these shape the world.
The City is a jewel, coveted
by many, held tight in one fist.

[illegible]

Wagadu A San S A Wal - Kus
Wagadu A Tah - Ifr *Bounce*
Wagadu A Wal - Kus *Bounce*
Dislodged
Wagadu F Awl S F Tka - Tas

Retreat Possibilities

Arabian F Ujj is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Chinese A Tib can retreat to Nnz, Pal, Sic, Uyg or disband
French F WtS can retreat to SWo, Tka or disband

Position Power Abb 909 910 Change SCs changing possession

1 West Frankish Kingdom (France) F 21 23* +2 +Crs, +Jer
2 Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) A 20 19 -1 -Jer, +Tib, -Ujj
3 Kingdom of Axum X 12 14 +2 +KuS, +Wal
4 Kingdom of Sri Vijaya V 12 13 +1 +Ujj
5 Kingdom of Denmark D 9 11 +2 +Bas, +Bul
6 Byzantine Empire B 8 8 0
7 Tang Empire (China) C 9 8 -1 -Tib
8 East Frankish Kingdom (German) G 7 7 0
9 Principality of Kiev (Russia) R 2 2 0

Adjustments

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) builds 2 units, can build in Ard, Arm, Aze, Bag, Geo, Her, Isf, Tam, Urg
Byzantine Empire makes no adjustments
Tang Empire (China) disbands 1 unit
Kingdom of Denmark builds 2 units, can build in Bja, Est, Jln, Jor (ec), Jor, Jor (wc), Nov, Sca, Vik, Wsx
West Frankish Kingdom (France) builds 3 units, can build in Aqt, Bri, Cad, Cor, Dub, Gas, LBU, Lot, Mau, Nar, Pam, Par, Rom (ec), Rom, Rom (wc), Sal, Swa
East Frankish Kingdom (German) makes no adjustments
Principality of Kiev (Russia) makes no adjustments
Kingdom of Sri Vijaya builds 1 unit, can build in But, Cah, Cho, Jam, Kal, Kam, Plm, Ser, Zim
Kingdom of Wagadu disbands 2 units
Kingdom of Axum builds 2 units, can build in Adu, Ale, Ale (nc), Ale (sc), AQa, Axu, JeJ, Mak, Mal, Roh, Yem

Fall/Autumn 910 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

About the press comment by Nick..Really? Nick has never seen a real press war. This stuff is all really small in the big picture of press in just about any other day, not just the old days.

Heh

Again, these are OK, but not exceptional, the game is bogging down a bit and Nick is either trying to make it sound good or really believes this is exciting, but "for the fans", I'm going to slog on.

Matt knew that F Ujj was a goner last season. In general, Matt played better this year since his NBR, but he has lost Jerusalem. Guessing right on Tibet is a real coup, especially if he plans to break behind the Chinese/Sri Vijayan lines. While he can be cut off, this is possibly a real mess for Lynn. Nevertheless, as I said last time, he faces attacks from every side, there is no deal with France, and the longer term prospects are grim. He tried to move out of Jerusalem to build there, but Nigs nixed that option. With annihilation, there are

Samanid A Bas is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Samanid A Bul is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Spanish F Crs is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Wagadu A Wal can retreat to Aga, Sij or disband

10 Kingdom of Wagadu W 4 2* -2 -KuS, -Wal
11 Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) E 0 0 0
12 Pratihara Kingdom (India) I 0 0 0
13 Khaganate of Khazaria K 0 0 0
14 Umayyad Emirate (Spain) S 1 0 -1 -Crs
15 Samanid Emirate (Turan) T 2 0 -2 -Bas, -Bul
* depends on French retreat

Retreat Adjudications

Chinese A Tib retreats to Uyg
French F Wts retreats to Swo
Wagadu A Wal retreats to Aga

two builds somewhere though, so there is something to work with, more on those below. In the alliance sense, without an ally, Matt has to keep losing ground in the long run. There are no natural defenses in his position and almost every remaining power on the board can be, or is, attacking him.

The move out of Jerusalem was odd. Did he know that there would be a supported attack on it? Even so, why jump the gun? Maybe he did want to build a fleet, but if so, that's too little, much too late. What good would one more fleet do in the Med at this point?

True, he badly needs a new alliance. Given his resistance to the westerners in the north, I would have been surprised by an alliance with France, especially as France doesn't seem to cede much to his allies, new or old. Both Axum, Indonesia and China are out of the question. He could certainly ally with Byzantium, but what could two declining powers do together? Still, there are interesting

builds he could make in that sense.

Arabia appears to be under attack on all sides. At this point all he can do is make choices about who takes his SCs. I'm still wondering if he'll throw a lot to France. It's what I would do in his position. And he walks out of Jerusalem to make sure that France takes it, even if Axum doesn't give a support. I suspect France is the only player talking to him right now.

Arabia also seems to have decided to block Axum. That should be possible for quite some time. Axum only has a narrow window to attack, and Arabia could lose lots of territory on other fronts before needing to lose Basra.

On the Chinese front, Arabia bizarrely manages to take Tibet, a dagger thrust against another foe.

Axum efficiently wraps up the heart of the Wagadu centers, either negotiates France out of Alexandria or lucks out as France decides to join the pig pile on #2, and solidifies a clear third place over Sri Vijaya in the race to see who gets ahead of Arabia first. Axum is still doing nothing directly to challenge French power, though now all those African armies could charge north to minor effect.

Maybe the support of the French fleet to Jerusalem was a last-minute negotiation, but maybe it was decided last spring. That would explain that odd move to Mecca. At any rate, he can now build in Alexandria, if he wants -- but he certainly won't be building a Mediterranean fleet there.

His African armies could and probably should try to take over North Africa, but that doesn't look like it is what Axum is doing. He moved one African army westward to Sudd, and moved a fleet to the Red Sea, apparently to convoy new or returning armies to Arabia's heartland. I still think, why now? If he didn't pursue the stab of Arabia a couple of years ago, why do so now, when it only smooths the French road to world domination?

Certainly, he's maintaining his status as a major power on the board, but shows no sign of having a strategic vision of the board.

I don't have much new to say about Axum. He's positioned himself to be the big guy in the middle without allies who will be attacked on all fronts. The most he can hope for is that the Easties will need him to stop France. I suspect that's his hope. But really - so what? It'll end in sadness and tears.

As always, Gregory makes tactical decisions that are hard to argue with or fault. But he still makes no progress in the lonely battle to find an ally against France. The strategic retreat from the Illyrian Sea but is big trouble as soon as France builds the Fleet East

Coast of Rome and outflanks him. I might have stayed there and tried the unwanted support into Rome. The option clearly was there. Without an ally, this all is still moot though, so that's what needs to be tried.

Hey, a support to Rome would have been cool! But it wasn't done, and now France can easily build on the Roman east coast, which cuts his position in pieces.

The moves around Dalmatia and Hungary are beginning to look very repetitious.

I'm looking at the map and finding it very hard to distinguish between brown French fleets and purple Byz fleets. Byz is about to be outnumbered. I'm going to guess that he'll let France exploit the middle while continuing to block Germany.

Jia holding didn't make sense to me, take the chance that Arabia won't go for Tibet, sure, but NEVER leave an army sitting where it can't help. Jia should have moved to Guizhou and then would have been better ready to defend against a breach. Now, China can remove the fleet, so the loss of the center is not TOO damaging, Sri Vijaya is hardly about to stab now, but Lynn's way to break into double digits for a supply center count and to stay there look more and more bleak by the season.

China is still playing an extremely defensive game, including maintaining forces against the completely non-existent potential threat from Indonesia. China has been holding a fleet in place for the entire game; now he'll finally have the occasion to scuttle it.

China's moves are becoming largely irrelevant. First, he was blocked in the West by Samanid. Then Samanid was stabbed by Arabia, but instead of working with Arabia or Samanid, he tried to keep playing with only Sri as his ally. But his rebuilds were too far from the front, so by the time he's gotten moving again, the Russian front is dominated by the Danes and French.

The basic problem is the map. It's very easy to block armies from the East if they try to move West.

The very barely slightly whimsical order writing seems to suggest some boredom, but I think the Danes are very happy to play second fiddle and will stab Germany as soon as Byzantium is taken down a peg; The Danish fleets are pretty useless, and now with Sri Vijaya pushing this time they may need another Danish fleet to be built in Great Britain and moved in as a stopgap. On the other side of the board, France continues the "unequal" move forward, seemingly CHOOSING not to help Germany, take out Kiev, etc. and lets Denmark take out Turan. The Danes get both Bulgar and Bashkortostan. Unless a miracle happens and China and Arabia ally to stop them, this front continues to move forward and collapses it completely in two game years or so. Once they also stab Germany, Denmark can surge

into second place. But still, that's all it will be, France is still on the path to the solo.

Perhaps Denmark negotiated the two remaining Turan centers in exchange for agreeing to move out of the Canaries, for the strategic fleet move along the west African coast. Actually, Denmark may be as well placed as anyone to take Awl when Wagadu gives up the ghost.

Also, with two builds, Denmark will be in a position to take advantage of an eventual stab of Germany. Still, he will be playing second fiddle to France to the end.

Denmark continues to play Gilligan to France's Skipper. His Little Buddy antics are never going to be enough to threaten to win the game, but there are many players who don't think about the game that way.

Wow, Fleet Western Sea is dislodged, what a setback! Everywhere else it is all systems go, France is ready to build the Fleet Rome (East Coast) to break the Mediterranean, takes Jerusalem to establish the end point of the goal of having the Mediterranean be a French lake, and magnanimously helps the Danes ALMOST keep pace, while keeping Germany in the cage. Why change if all goes well? Maybe Arabia did reach out, maybe not, but taking Jerusalem after Arabia failed to build a fleet there all these years just shows how "no good deed goes unpunished" in Diplomacy.

France continues his steady, fluid advance. He keeps finding new powers like Axum ready to help him along with little in return. If everyone is willing to help him along, why not accept it?

I've played this game many times. There's always one absurdly large power and a bunch of flunkies unwilling to oppose him, even as they dig their own graves.

F Western Sea is dislodged, but can retreat to a SC for a pickup. That would be typical of how this game is developing.

This fleet battle illustrates one problem with this map that I've been complaining about. There are fleet passages around Africa, but it's far too easy to bottle them up.

Did France and Denmark give Germany some hint that he would actually get Kiel this time (instead of excising the Turan units)?

(cough, _Kiev_, cough. Kiel's in Germany, right?)
Probably didn't even bother, one can only think that Russell is resigned to his fate. Or does he really believe that anything other than the sandwiching blows will come once Byzantium retreats back? I actually don't think Germany will ever be given another build.

More of the same around Russia and northern Byzantium. A slow dance in place. Once France gets a fleet in the Adriatic, will there be any good reason to keep Germany alive?

No.

Kiev waits until Denmark and France decides to go for these centers all out. Kiev did get Arabian support again, but very soon that front will collapse.

Kiev got both Arabian and Byzantine support, but he has no way to do any better than stay in place.

John R. just did not have anything in the game after Matt stabbed him, PERIOD. Better that he's gone.

Agreed. Perhaps he could have chosen who got to feast on his centers, probably not even that.

Nathan played it tough for awhile, but likewise was doomed without a stronger ally.

It took a while, but the end was evident for a long time.

Russia, Samanid, and Spain had been reduced to the stage of "squatting on dots along the front". That only works for a little while. Spain and Samanid are gone, and Russia probably won't last much longer either. Byz is going to lose more SCs, and that will make it harder for him to prop up Russia.

The Ujj attack goes off as previously signalled. An attempt to move up the Atlantic coast is made, but it seems useless as France and Denmark seem easily able to stop it when they want to. They aren't putting effort there since they have no need or want to gain centers there. The Arabian push into Tibet stretches him out in ways that make him easy to attack; however, it is theoretically possible for that army to become a rogue. That won't be pretty for Sri Vijaya. China needs to remove the army and ensure for the team that this doesn't happen.

Indonesia may have hoped for a different build, but an army in Cambodia can help him against Arabia, too. Perhaps he will end up with Tibet.

Indonesia needs to ask himself the question: why will this game not end in a France solo? He doesn't appear to be addressing that question.

What's the strategy here? Try to blast through Arabia before France takes all of Europe and Africa for himself?

At least Mikael is going down fighting!

And diploming! The arrangement with Denmark

showed that he was still playing diplomacy.

and his fate will be to be another 1-SC power squatting along a mini-stalemate line.

China retreats north and leaves things open for Arabia to go rogue on Sri Vijaya. Does Lynn care for the Juggernaut alliance? Apparently not. Will Sri Vijaya have to build an army in Kambuja as a defense? Probably.

But, as said above, maybe Indonesia will end up taking Tibet.

Interesting, again, even though France is the cause of the Wagadu problems, he leaves Wagadu with two rather than one. Is this a set up for Wagadu keeping the two Eastern armies and joining the attack on Axum in Egypt? Possibly.

Maybe, but Axum's fight against Arabia is useful to France. Maybe France will let him continue, hoping that Arabia will eventually remove the northern Asian forces.

The Canaries are going to eventually go to France.

Wagadu does retreat to Aga to set up that possibility.

Lots of problems, lots of choices. I think Arabia has to build in the homeland and try to stop Axum and Sri Vijaya there, but he doesn't have to. He could say, "OK, France took Jerusalem, I'm throwing everything at France." Army Tamantarka and Fleet Georgia would be interesting builds. But it really is about the diplomacy for Matt.

It's this winter and next year which will show whether Arabia and Byzantium will start working together or not.

If I were China, I would just disband the fleet and forget about defense that is not needed.

Certainly, that's China's least useful unit.

It is likely that a Fleet in Wessex and an Army in Bjarmaland are the moves that keep the Danish hopes of making second place going. Second is for losers though. Is there any chance of builds to attack France? Sure, it remains possible, if difficult.

If Denmark wanted to attack France, he would have done so several years ago. He has apparently decided to fight for an indisputable place in the draw that still looks to be the most probably ending.

The aforementioned F Rome (East Coast) and an Army Mauretania are pretty well guaranteed. He might waive the third one and keep waiving one every year just to keep that in his back pocket.

True, although if he plans to stab Germany very soon, another army in his homeland could be useful. lower Burgundy, maybe, or Lot.

Probably the rogue defense will be built as stated before, but he could build F Zimbabwe and keep moving up the Atlantic coast (and force something to happen with the two Wagadu centers).

Lots of choices for Wagadu, but they really only matter for others, I see everyone here as whittling the small powers out now.

Axum can build in Egypt to defend it, and that's likely.

If Axum builds in Egypt, it will certainly be an army. Also, I'd expect an army in Adu and/or Yemen to be convoyed to Arabia.

How will another army be useful? He's got complete control of inland Africa. But he won't be able to get out of Africa without having some kind of naval presence.

As I see it, this game will only become interesting again if Denmark does something other than stick by France unreservedly, which is what he's been doing. Since I'm not expecting that to happen, I think this game is going to take a terribly uninteresting path.

Winter 910 Results

Adjustment Adjudications

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) Builds A Bag
Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) Builds A Isf

Kingdom of Axum Builds A Ale
Kingdom of Axum Builds A Yem

Kingdom of Denmark Builds A Bja
Kingdom of Denmark Builds A Nov

Kingdom of Sri Vijaya Builds F Jam

Kingdom of Wagadu Disbands A Aga
Kingdom of Wagadu Disbands A Tah

Tang Empire (China) Disbands A Kyr

West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Cad
West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Dub
West Frankish Kingdom (France) Builds F Rom (ec)

And the draw proposal failed to pass.

Winter 910 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

I'm really losing patience here...

Arabia is saying to Axum: You really want Basra? Suck. On. This.

North, south, east or west, let's vote for SOUTH, if stabbing the Samanid was a bad idea and taking the hit from Axum for ruining their three way alliance was just desserts, then this is the cherry on top of the sundae? Rick, is that what he's sucking on?

Arabia had a choice between building on the East Euxine Sea coast, including at least one fleet, with a view towards holding Byzantium up in the eastern Med, or building against Axum. We have no idea of what is going on diplomatically between Arabia and Byzantium, if anything, but obviously building against Axum, which is essential for surviving, won out.

And Axum is saying "Yes, I'm going to build only armies because if I just build enough armies, somehow the map will let me use them all to support Basra.

No fleet, no mas, jump into the Suez Canal and play Pharoah who finds that Moses is not on his side!

As I thought, Axum build an army in Alexandria. It could well be that a promise to do that was part of the Alexandria to Jerusalem deal. The other build is anti-Arabia, destined to be convoyed over to Arabia's heartland. Axum obviously intends to race Denmark for second place.

And Denmark is saying "If I only build armies that cannot hurt France, maybe he'll pat me on the head and say 'nice doggie!'"

Why would he change at this point?

Bja is obviously intended to help push down against the northern Arabian centers, but maybe the Nov army is meant for Germany. We'll see.

Maybe Denmark thinks that Arabia will give him all his northern centers for free. Maybe these are the Border Collies for France?

SV builds F Jam? Dumbest build of the game. I'm trying to not be personally insulting, but really. Where is this fleet going to go, that will help SV any?

The only way this is a good build is if Sri stabs the hell out of China. Otherwise, the fleet has nowhere to go.

The Eastern Juggernaut has held all game, why not just blow it up now? If China won't disband the fleet then I'll build one!

True, it is very difficult to see what this build could possibly be useful for. If he had nothing special to build (although an army in Cambodia might have been useful), why not waive the build for later use?

Not much else to do for Wagadu.

Mikael is not the problem, not a solution either, but not the problem.

Maybe he had set up the two armies for an eventual foray into Axum's Alexandria, but if so that was obviously ruled out. He is to hold on to Awl. Going to make for a boring game for Mikael until he is wiped out.

China seems to have also caught the "why should I bother to fight France if you won't" bug. Good thing he kept that fleet though. Because...wait, why is that a good idea? If SV wants to stab him, one fleet won't make a difference.

I won't disband that fleet, I won't, I won't. Am I worried about the line that Yugra sets? No gosh darn way, it's too cold up there anyway!

When did China ever show any sign that he was worried about the Yugra army? Still, this sets a record for irrational adjustments.

This board is a land of blind people, and France is the man with one eye.

These were the fleet builds I was expecting, I might have withheld the F Cad build, but why not, you have everyone cowed, it really doesn't matter, does it??

F Rome (ec) and F Cad were obvious. But f Dub? If he was planning to stab Germany soon, an army would make more sense.

It's time to figure out exactly how many SCs he'll need to win. Hmm...I guess he'll need to double in size again. No matter. France has 9 fleets in the Med, Byz has 4, and nobody else has any. France be able to push his way all the way to the Black Sea basin, at which point _all_ of the European SCs are his for the taking. Roughly speaking, that means adding 11 Danish, 7 German, and 8 Byzantine SCs to his 23, for a total of

While the seven German centers are coming pretty soon, I am not sure if he ever will stab Denmark. But really, who cares at this point?

Somebody should remind me why this is a demo game.

We're reaching some level of annoyance as handing a win to someone with game years and game years of foresight is just not a "stop the leader" strategy. I think we were learning helpful things about playing large variants earlier, but we are learning now about what happens when people tire of these large games. This is not helpful, as Rick suggests.

Spring/Summer 911 Results

The Spring 911 season has been adjudicated. It was a relatively quiet season this year. The stalemate in Eastern Europe continues. The Arabian gain of Tibet last fall has been reversed, although now that army has the chance to retreat into the Tang/Srivijayan backlines and create chaos. In Africa, Wagadu's time in this game looks likely to end soon. Finishing in the Med, the French fleet build in Rome looks like it could tip the balance in the war with Byzantium, with the French now well positioned to push into the Ionian and Libyan Seas.

I'm having a lot of fun with the creative order sets, and put my favorite one (from Trout) in our subject line this week. A new player joined the fray, with the East Franks sending an entire set of offbeat orders. We also have another lovely set of press from our favorite poet, Li Bo.

PRESS (anonymous)

[illegible]

The edicts of Heaven are
unknown but no less just for that.
On the mountain the air is
sweet as rain pelts the valley below.
I watch the waters rush to
an unknown end in the far desert lands.
If they knew, would they be
in such a hurry to descend?

The caravans bring tales of
the sons of Mahomet; men fierce and grasping,
Who see Justice in their own
deeds; and only folly in others.
The crane cries from a
thicket; it endorses no creed, no confession.
Its flight writes an
uncertain message on the morning sky.

Li Bo

[illegible]

Spring Adjudications

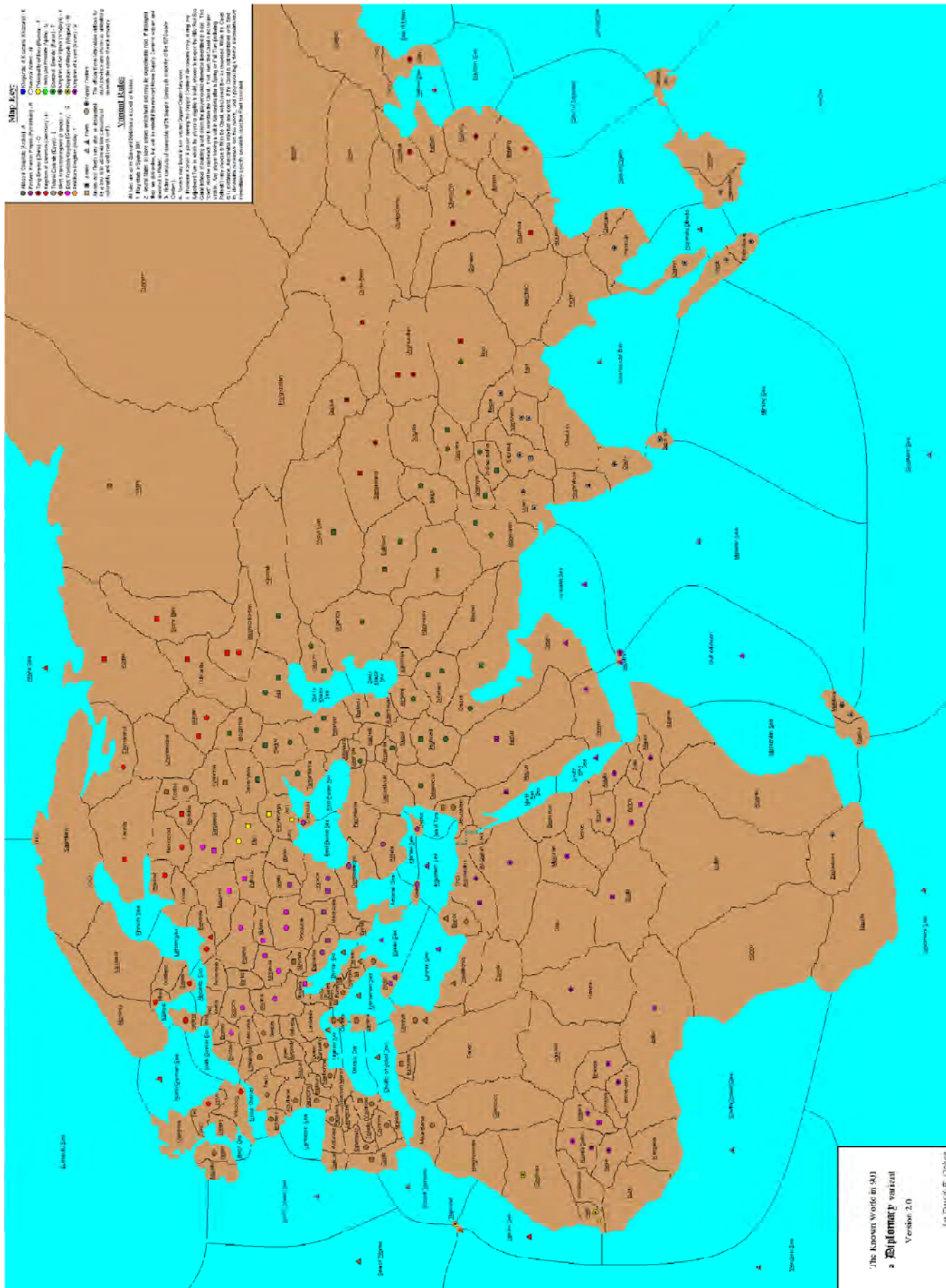
Arabian A Ati S A Kip *Cut*
 Arabian A Bag S A Dam
 Arabian A Bal S A Ati
 Arabian A Blk S A Kas
 Arabian A Bsr S A Man *Cut*
 Arabian A Buk S A Blk
 Arabian A Dam can't believe the
 French, of all peoples, are in
 Jerusalem (holds)
 Arabian A Ghu S A Kip
 Arabian A Ind S A Kas *Cut*
 Arabian A Isf S A Bsr
 Arabian A Kas S A Ind *Cut*
 Arabian A Kip S A Ati
 Arabian A Kyk - Sam *Bounce*
 Arabian A Man S A Bsr
 Arabian A Mrd S A Sev *Cut*
 Arabian A Sev S A Kie
 Arabian A Sha S A Ind

Arabian A Srk S A Mrd
Arabian A Tib - Nep *Bounce*
Dislodged (**Disbands**)

Axum A Ale S A Bar
Axum A Kan - Sud
Axum A Kus - Awd *Bounce*
Axum A Mec S A Jer - Dam
Axum A Nio - Jel
Axum A Sud - Roh
Axum A Tir - Wal *Bounce*
Axum A Wal - Kus *Bounce*
Axum A Yem - Nef
Axum F Ars S F Oma - Bsr
Axum F Gad S F Ars
Axum F Oma - Bsr *Bounce*
Axum F Soc S F Gad
Axum F Srs S F Gad

Byzantine A Dal S A Thr - Ono
Cut
Byzantine A Mac S A Dal
Byzantine A Thr - Ono *Bounce*
Byzantine A Vla - Ava
Byzantine F Egs - Bar *Bounce*
Byzantine F los S F Lis *Cut*
Byzantine F Lis S F Egs - Bar
Byzantine F Scl S F los

Chinese A Cha S A Sog - Tib
Chinese A Jia - Gui
Chinese A Orb S A Sam
Chinese A Qar S A Sam
Chinese A Sam H
Chinese A Sog - Tib
Chinese A Uyg S A Sog - Tib
Chinese F Yes H



Danish A Bas S A Udm - Ati
 Danish A Bja - Kom
 Danish A Bul S A Vya - Mrd
 Danish A Kom - Stb
 Danish A Kri S A Ros - Vya
 Danish A Nov - Kar
 Danish A Udm - Ati *Bounce*
 Danish F Tas - Sos *Bounce*
 Danish F Borussia Plays With
 Sock-Puppets (holds)
 Danish F North German Sea
 Makes Dolphin Weiner-Schnitzel
 (Yum) (holds)
 Danish F White Sea Makes a List
 Of Who's Naughty Or Nice (Holds)

French A Jer - Dam *Bounce*
 French A Kut S F Tys - lfr
 French A Lom - Rom
 French A Ros - Vya *Bounce*
 French A Sla S A Aqu - Dal
 French A Slr S A Spo - Tar
 French A Spo - Tar *Bounce*
 French A Val H
 French A Vya - Mrd *Bounce*
 French A Yug S A Bas
 French F Bar S F lfr - Tri *Cut*
 French F Bls - Sjt
 French F Cad - Sta

French F Crs S F Sar - Tys
 French F Dub - Nos
 French F lfr - Tri
 French F Lgs S F Sar - Tys
 French F Rom (ec) - lls
 French F Sar - Tys
 French F Sta - Tka
 French F Swo S F Sta - Tka
 French F Tar - los *Bounce*
 French F Tys - lfr

German A Aqu continues its
 unrelenting assault on Dal - We
 will get in there eventually!!! (A
 Aqu to Dal *Bounce*)
 German A Maz hears about this
 great chicken dish the Russians
 prepare so head out looking for
 some (A Maz to Kie *Bounce*)
 German A Mor lines up behind A
 Ono with bayonets fixed - No way
 those cowardly currs are gonna
 run (A Mor supports A Ono)
 German A Ono supports A Aqu's
 unrelenting assault on Dal - I think
 he can, I think he can!?!? (A Ono
 supports A Aqu to Dal *Cut*)
 German A Smo helps out a brother
 solider in his quest for a truely

scrumptious meal (A Smo
 supports A Maz to Kie)
 German A Vis offers A Ono moral
 support by shouting encouraging
 words - "You go boys!!!" (A Vis
 supports A Ono)
 German A Vol (ok I have
 completely run out of things to say)
 supports A Maz to Kie.

Russian A Kie S A Pec *Cut*
 Russian A Pec S A Kie

Srivijayan A Knj - Ind *Bounce*
 Srivijayan A Nep - Kas *Bounce*
 Srivijayan A Ujj S A Knj - Ind
 Srivijayan A Var - Pal *Bounce*
 Srivijayan F Cob - Pal *Bounce*
 Srivijayan F Gos S F Wts
 Srivijayan F Jam - Krs
 Srivijayan F Mah S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Mas S A Ujj
 Srivijayan F Ras S A Ujj
 Srivijayan F Sos - Tas *Bounce*
 Srivijayan F Sus S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Wts S F Sos - Tas

Wagadu A San - Awd *Bounce*
 Wagadu F Awl S F Tas - Sos

Spring/Summer 911 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

Arabia still has a lot of units, but loses one more this spring. Nepal is dislodged, there is the opportunity to go for the rear of China/SV, but he chooses to retreat it off the board instead.

More than that, though, this was one of only TWO actual moves that Arabia attempted. Contrary to popular belief, Matt is being attacked from South, North, East, and West, the only other (bounce) attempted move from Kyk-Sam basically also was a support move, though China didn't move Sam anyway or attempt a support order.

So since Arabia is NOT sitting on stalemate lines, this strategy essentially is doomed. Matt still needs an ally somewhere, perhaps the retreat off the board is intended to solicit the favors of the Juggernaut. We'll see if it helps.

I thought that Arabia could hold out longer, but with the steady advances of Axum, China, Indonesia and the Franco-Danish front, his position could crumble soon. For the moment, he is doing lots of holding an auto supporting. He lost Tibet, predictably enough, but could send the army to Nanzhao to see what

mischief it could do.

At least B. is trying to do something, the only supports not doing much are the supports of Gulf of Aden (did he really think Sri Vijaya might attack him or was it more of a "not much else to do move" -- probably better to do than holding -- BUT it illustrates that Axum does have all these fleets with nothing to do, maybe he and Sri Vijaya should work out some moves to dislodge fleets off the board to build armies in other places to move forward? Let's see if we see that in the Fall), and THEN the disturbing move. Axum does things, but he supports the French army Barca to hold and also supports the French A Jerusalem to Damascus. Axum appears to be supporting the French and not moving to attack the French. Why? Is Byzantium supposed to oppose the French all by himself? There is no move toward North Africa at all, just some lame moves on Wagadu

Axum has become the new French umm, what is the polite synonym for "toady"?

He supported both the French move to Damascus and (especially) Barca to hold, thus saving the

center for France. Hope that he doesn't expect gratitude for that.

Yemen was not convoyed, but moved to Nefud, against Basra/Baghdad/Damascus. Several other African armies moved eastward from the Wagadu front, and probably will be convoyed to the Arabian heartland.

Axum is doing squat.

Byzantium continues the lonely and doomed defense of the Mediterranean, rather than getting help, gets Axum helping the French too. The move to Ava was worried about the right thing, but likely means that the Kievian defenses are finally broken this fall.

Byzantium is still holding his own in the Med, in spite of the French advance into his back in the Illyrian Sea. He would have taken Barca without Axum's support. Not bad, but the weight of the French forces are against him -- and diplomatically he has not advanced one iota.

I think that Byz will be eliminated, along with Wagadu and Russia. At that point either France will solo or there will be a big boring draw.

OK, so the Chinese kept the fleet, but it just sits there. They take Tibet back from Arabia, risking a forward retreat, but that forward retreat doesn't materialize (by arrangement?). Probably not by arrangement, since Lynn also moves forward to Guizhou in possible defense against that forward retreat.

China re-took Tibet, as predicted, and also finally moved Jia west to protect against the retreat of the Tibet army. Otherwise, in place, all.

Rather than having the Danish try to entertain us with funny moves, how about if he tries to organize some opposition to France? Some maneuvering around goes on, but we're really waiting for Kiev to fall and for the line to then start to lurch forward south. That should happen in the fall.

Denmark doesn't get anywhere in central Asia, but with the move into Stone Belt and the Chinese pressure on Arabia, can probably advance to Kip in the fall. This will open the door to lots of Arabian centers to the west or to the south. the Nov army joins in the Central Asian front.

Along the African coast, the Dane accepts Wagadu support against the southern Indonesian fleets, while France gets the Canary. Maybe Denmark will get Awl?

I don't care what Denmark does. He's writing joke orders. Is it fair to say that his play is a joke?

As I see it, there are two possibilities

- 1) France stabs him to solo. Denmark doesn't seem to care about this possibility.*
- 2) A mega-draw is declared. Apparently this is the goal.*

I don't have much new to say here.

Relentlessly efficient, the French machine marches on. Suzanne questioned the Fleet Dublin above, but note that it moves down to fill in the Atlantic line, this is now blocked and with no attempt by Axum to attack North Africa (France knew this since he also moved the fleet to Sea of Tangiers, with no sense of urgency about getting armies there. Valencia is set up to convoy to Mauretania in the Fall though. France gives up on leaving the Wagadu island center alone and supports himself to Tkanaren. Wagadu will likely survive one more game year, but this Atlantic line also is locked up. France may or may not decide to push forward on it with land support, we'll see. He doesn't really need to as Arabia seems to be everyone's target for elimination.

Surprise! France gets the Canary (Islands). Since he supported himself in, he is apparently prepared to stay. The Dublin fleet goes south to join the crowd, either in the Med or along the African coast.

France moves to the Illyrian Sea, as predicted. Otherwise, moves slowly around the Med, no major breakthroughs.

Diplomatically, though, he has found a new follower in Axum. He would have lost Barca to Byzantium without Axum's support. Axum also supported the French move to Damascus.

He makes token moves in central Asia, allowing Denmark to carry the attack (Yug supports Bas, Ros - Vya) He also makes the usual support for Germany in the German-Byzantine dance.

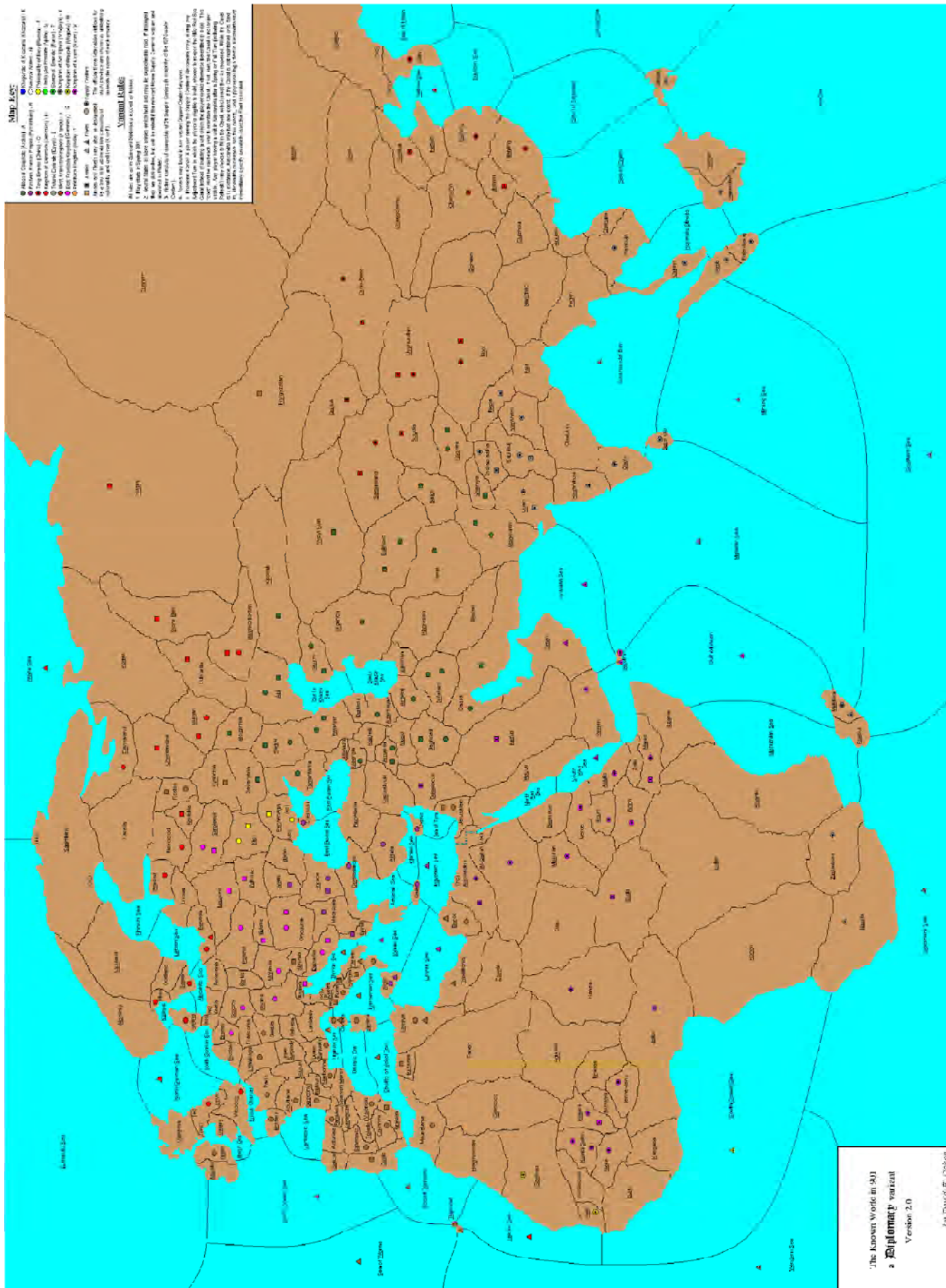
France is beating back the French fleets. He should move past the boot with the Fall move.

The Germans will finally get into Kiev in the fall, chicken or no chicken. But will Nigs let him have an actual BUILD?

The usual dance around Dalmatia, Ono and Kiev

Germany should take Dalmatia - if that is what France wants to happen.

The Russians didn't do anything to bring this on themselves (other than the fight with the game designer that he won in order to lose the war). Pechenegs will survive this year, and then can ultimately retreat to Cherson to survive for awhile, but the Russian goose is



Fall Adjudications

Arabian A Ati S A Mrd *Cut*
 Arabian A Bag S A Dam *Cut*
 Arabian A Bal S A Ati
 Arabian A Blk S A Kas
 Arabian A Bsr S A Man *Cut*
 Arabian A Buk - Sam *Bounce*
 Arabian A Dam H *Dislodged*
 Arabian A Ghu S A Kip
 Arabian A Ind H *Dislodged*
 Disbanded
 Arabian A Isf S A Bsr
 Arabian A Kas S A Ind *Cut*
 Arabian A Kip S A Kyk
 Arabian A Kyk S A Kip
 Arabian A Man S A Bsr
 Arabian A Mrd S A Sev *Cut*
 Arabian A Sev S A Kie *Cut*
 Arabian A Sha S A Ind *Cut*
 Arabian A Srk S A Mrd

Axum A Kus - Awd (says if at first you don't succeed, try, try again)
 Bounce
 Axum A Wal - Kus (reminds A KuS of Einstein's definition of insanity)
 Bounce
 Axum A Tir - Jel (tells A KuS and A Wal to piss off, and heads east to hop a cruise further east)
 Axum A Jel - Sud (tells A Tir to get in line, he was here first)
 Axum A Sud - Mro (turns north for their own private cruise ship)
 Axum A Roh - Mal (is the first in a long line of Carnival Cruise passengers)
 Axum A Nef - Bag (wishes they were on a cruise instead of the miserable desert) *Bounce*
 Axum A Mec - Dam
 (circumambulates the Kaaba a few times, and then heads north to Damascus)
 Axum A Ale S F Bar (goes to the library to pick up the new Harry Potter book)
 Axum F Srs S F Gad (goes spearfishing)
 Axum F Gad S F Ars (points and laughs when F SRS spears an old rusty can instead of a fish)
 Axum F Ars S F Oma - Bsr (points and laughs when F SRS slaps F GAd upside his ugly head)
 Axum F Oma - Bsr (points and

laughs while F SRS and F GAd kick each other's ass) *Bounce*
 Axum F Soc S F Gad (points and laughs when F Oma catches a stray punch and gets laid out cold)

Byzantine A Ava - Vol *Bounce*
 Byzantine A Dal - Ono *Bounce*
 Dislodged
 Byzantine A Mac S A Dal - Ono
 Byzantine A Thr S A Dal - Ono
 Byzantine F Egs S F los
 Byzantine F los S F Lis
 Byzantine F Lis S F los *Cut*
 Byzantine F Scl S F Lis

Chinese A Cha - Uyg
 Chinese A Gui - Jia
 Chinese A Orb S A Sam
 Chinese A Qar S A Sam
 Chinese A Sam S A Uyg - Sog
 Cut
 Chinese A Tib - Kas *Bounce*
 Chinese A Uyg - Sog
 Chinese F Yes H

Danish A Bas S A Udm - Ati
 Danish A Bul - Mrd *Bounce*
 Danish A Kar - Che
 Danish A Kom - Yug
 Danish A Kri S A Ros - Vya
 Danish A Stb S A Bas
 Danish A Udm - Ati *Bounce*
 Danish F Bor counts their toes (holds)
 Danish F Ngs pulls some teeth (holds)
 Danish F Tas S F Awl - Sos
 Danish F Whs makes snow
 Danishes (hold)

French A Jer (yes of course Jerusalem is French) S F Mec - Dam (outremer for ever!)
 French A Kut - Ifr *Bounce*
 French A Rom H (a party)
 French A Spo H (to avoid spoiling the party)
 French A Slr H (why not, every other italian army is on holiday too)
 French A Ros - Vya (con dios)
 Bounce
 French A Sla S A Ono - Dal
 (crossing its fingers that it has more luck than A aqu)

French A Val - Gra
 French A Vya - Sev(erely punish the arabs) *Bounce*
 French A Yug - Kyr
 French F Bar S F Ifr - Lis
 French F Crs - Tys *Bounce*
 French F Ifr - Lis *Bounce*
 French F Ils S A Ono - Dal (will he get there, finally?)
 French F Lgs S F Crs - Tys
 French F Nos H (it's nose)
 French F Sjt S F Crs - Tys
 French F Sta gets confused and decides to hunt for sardines (holds)
 French F Swo S F Tka - Wts
 French F Tar H
 French F Tka - Wts (in search of el dorado) *Bounce*
 French F Tri S F Bar
 French F Tys H

German A Aqu is happy for the little bit of rest (supports A Ono - Dal)
 German A Maz S A Smo - Kie
 German A Mor - Ono
 German A Ono - Dal
 German A Smo now goes looking for that wonderful chicken dish (moves to Kie) *Bounce*
 German A Vis S A Mor - Ono
 German A Vol S A Smo - Kie
 Cut

Russian A Kie S A Pec *Cut*
 Russian A Pec S A Kie

Srivijayan A Knj S A Nep - Ind
 Srivijayan A Nep - Ind
 Srivijayan A Ujj - Sha *Bounce*
 Srivijayan A Var - Nep
 Srivijayan F Cob - Mis
 Srivijayan F Gos S F Wts
 Srivijayan F Krs - Cob
 Srivijayan F Mah S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Mas S F Ras - Ujj
 Srivijayan F Ras - Ujj *Bounce*
 Srivijayan F Sos S F Wts *Cut*
 Dislodged
 Srivijayan F Sus S F Mas
 Srivijayan F Wts S F Sos *Cut*

Wagadu A San - Awd *Bounce*
 Wagadu F Awl - Sos

Retreat Possibilities

Arabian A Dam can retreat to Arm, Cap, Mos or disband
Arabian A Ind is destroyed (no valid retreats)
Byzantine A Dal can retreat to Epi or disband
Srivijayan F SOS can retreat to Bur, Kng, Kon, Nam or disband
Retreat Adjudications
Arabian A Dam retreats to Arm
Byzantine A Dal retreats to Epi
Srivijayan F Sos retreats to Nam

Adjustments

Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) makes no adjustments
Byzantine Empire disbands 1 unit
Tang Empire (China) builds 1 unit, can build in ChA, Kai, Nan, Sil, Yan
Kingdom of Denmark makes no adjustments
Tulunid Emirate (Egypt) makes no adjustments
West Frankish Kingdom (France) builds 1 unit, can build in Aqt, Bri, Cad, Cor, Dub, Gas, LBU, Lot, Mau, Nar, Pam, Par, Rom (ec), Rom, Rom (wc), Sal, Sar, Swa, Val
East Frankish Kingdom (German) builds 1 unit, can build in Bav, Bre, Mor, Pol, Sax
Pratihara Kingdom (India) makes no adjustments
Khaganate of Khazaria makes no adjustments
Principality of Kiev (Russia) makes no adjustments
Umayyad Emirate (Spain) makes no adjustments
Samanid Emirate (Turan) makes no adjustments
Kingdom of Sri Vijaya builds 1 unit, can build in But, Cah, Cho, Jam, Kal, Kam, Plm, Ser, Var, Zim
Kingdom of Wagadu disbands 1 unit
Kingdom of Axum makes no adjustments
Neutral makes no adjustments

Position Power Abb 910 911 Change SCs changing possession

1 West Frankish Kingdom (France) F 23 24 +1 +Tka
2 Abbasid Caliphate (Arabia) A 19 17 -2 -Ind, -Tib
3 Kingdom of Sri Vijaya V 13 14 +1 +Ind
4 Kingdom of Axum X 14 14 0
5 Kingdom of Denmark D 11 11 0
6 Tang Empire (China) C 8 9 +1 +Tib
7 East Frankish Kingdom (German) G 7 8 +1 +Dal
8 Byzantine Empire B 8 7 -1 -Dal
9 Principality of Kiev (Russia) R 2 2 0
10 Kingdom of Wagadu W 2 1 -1 -Tka

Fall/Autumn 911 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

I have very little to say. Nothing new or significant is happening. The majority of players are not doing anything of interest.

Arabia again makes no serious attempt at movement, loses one more space and two more units with the loss of Tibet in the spring.

Arabia is obviously losing interest, perhaps because no one shows any interest in working with, rather than against, him.

He could make a real attempt to choose one

direction (towards Axum, for example?) and move that way; but I don't see what that would gain him. His only hope here is for diplomacy, and he doesn't seem to be heard anywhere.

Axum is going after the last Wagadu center, big deal? Not really. Again supporting France. Who cares?

More opportunistic moves against Arabia, and more support for France. As short-sighted as you get.

Gregory is down one and this is the start of being down much more. The move to Vol should have been

expected by others and Vol should have taken Kiev, but it didn't, so this was successful.

Byzantium is doing what he can all alone, but it's a losing position.

I still don't understand why Arabia and Byzantium aren't working together, fwiw.

The Chinese are successful against Arabia, but note that the French army in Yugra advanced still further in an outflanking move. France is being very patient, and China seems not to care.

And Gui moves back to Jia. Why go to an active front if you have a spot free behind the lines?

Otherwise, China continues nibbling at Arabia and ignoring the French advance.

And Denmark advances to Yugra.

What are they going to do when Wagadu has to disband that fleet?

The French engineer a move forward by the Wagadu, presumably losing next year unless a miracle happens though. Otherwise, the French are restrained this year. Why not be restrained when you're not being threatened? I think next year should be a big year for France.

I do agree with Jim that France is holding back. He could have advanced more aggressively in the Med than he has done.

He has armies on the boot that can be convoyed (to Epi, for example), but he apparently agreed to support the move to Dal for alliance reasons, oddly enough.

As for the fleets, is he waiting for Byzantium to start disbanding them?

Wagadu must have appreciated that gesture of supporting himself out of the Canaries for its true value (that is, practically nothing).

Germany seems to willfully WANT to be the last of the French allies to ever gain anything. This was obvious, WHY move from Smo instead of Vol??? Well, doesn't really matter, why shouldn't the French do all the gaining. But at least the Germans ARE allowed Dalmatia. But they could have gained two and maybe worked with Denmark to stab France? Nah, why would we want to do that, France is still so far from the victory condition?

If Denmark and Axum aren't thinking of stabbing

France, Germany certainly can't do it alone. Another build might have consolidated his position back home, but Germany isn't the best tactician of the crew.

The Russians just defend, ineptitude elsewhere means they survive one more year.

In the only place it matters in the game, SV is dislodged from South Ocean Sea in a stunning push back.

Sri Vijaya would really have been better off if he tried to work with Wagadu, instead of against him. Probably neither of them even thought of writing to the other.

Wagadu wins one, loses one....

As for the Arabian retreat, when in doubt, retreat to your open center to defend it, but Arabia is set to lose on all four North, South, East, West fronts next year.

Byzantine retreats, yes, but still has to remove something with nothing good to remove. I expect him to keep all the fleets and let the armies of the French alliance keep advancing in the north and rolling up that front (if the opponents will make the right moves).

Namib defends the path to the Zimbabwean center. I don't think Wagadu will reach it, but you don't want him retreating there when dislodged in the Spring.

I think Byzantine removes an army, but no good choices.

Doesn't matter what China does, but it would be nice to actually try to STOP the French advance before it becomes serious.

Because it's not serious already?

If he is going to try and outflank France/Denmark up north, ChA or Yan would be the least distant.

Does France build as if he is worried about the German build?

Nothing seems to worry France much, at this point. But he doesn't seem to have any place useful to build a fleet in the Med.

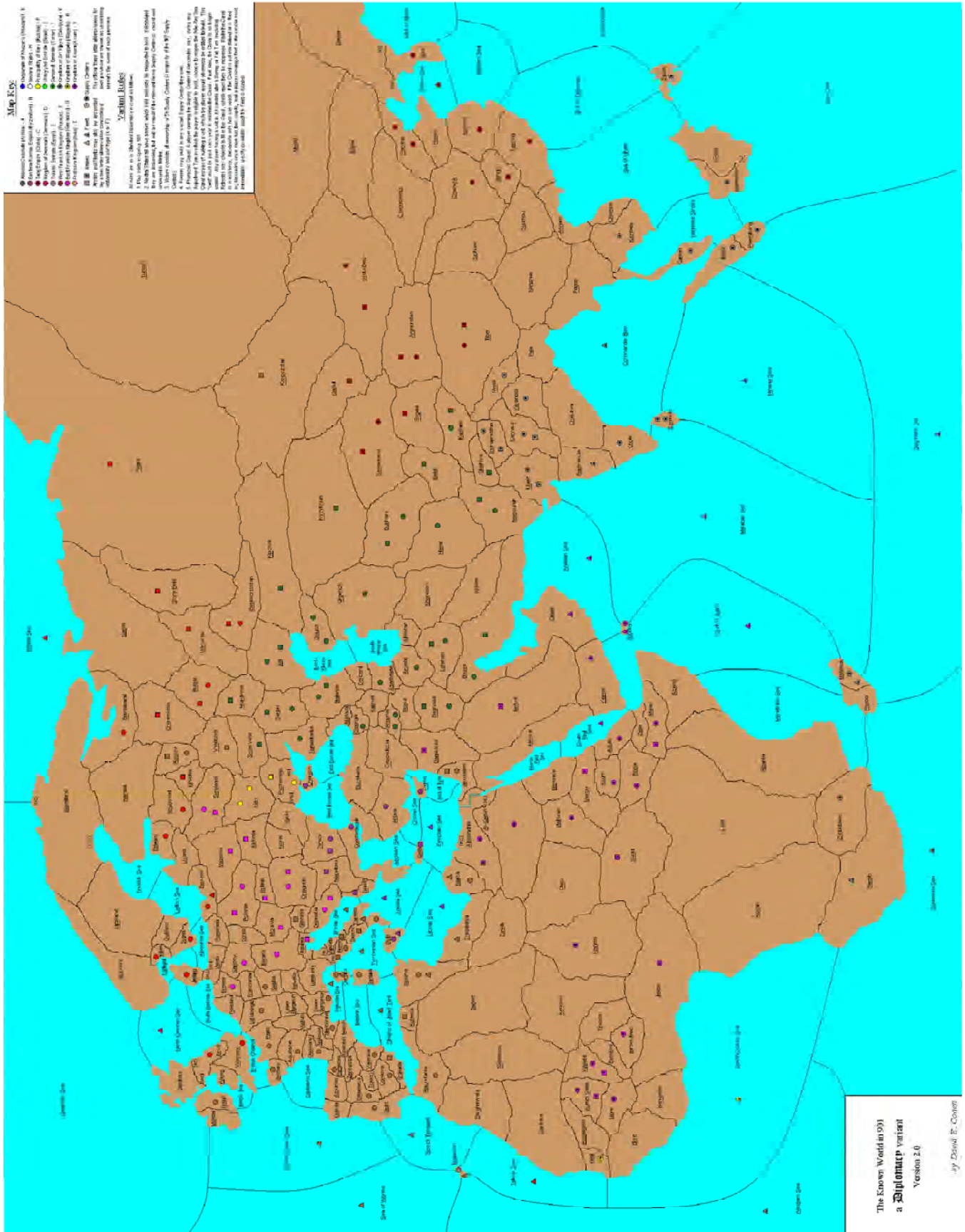
And do the Germans build as French toadies or something else?

Doesn't really matter much, does it?

For SV, another fleet, perhaps in Zimbabwe? Why not??

Presumably Wagadu removes the army.

Winter 911 Results



Winter 911 Adjudication

Byzantine Empire disbands A Avaria (no order received)
East Frankish Kingdom builds A Polonia
Sri Vijaya builds A Serendib

Tang Dynasty (China) builds A Yanjing
Wagadu disbands A Sanhaja
West Frankish Kingdom (France) waives the build

Winter 911 Commentary

Jim Burgess (normal text)

Rick Desper (italics)

Suzanne Castagne (bold)

As Jim already pointed out, there was no good disband, but keeping the fleets would be a good strategy. As luck turned out, that's what happened.

But the spark of Al Qaeda is born in Arabia, as the great, great, great, great, bunch more greats, grandfather of Osama Bin Laden is born in the Arabian peninsula, and the demise of the Byzantine empire is assured.

A Polonia backs up the armies that are taking Kiev and also active on the Dalmatia/Ono front, where Macedonia and Thrace are probably the next targets.

Jim-Bob's question -- will Germany build as a French toady or as an independent power, is answered; he is continuing to work with France and ignore the open centers at France's disposal. I had kind of hoped that he might do something "in between"; build in Moravia, for example. No such luck.

Agreed, being really aggressive was way too much to hope for, but full fledged toady behavior keeps the stab card firmly in France's capable hands.

A Serendip can be convoyed to Paga, so it looks as though Tibet is now at risk.

The setup is here to have the frustrated eastern powers start more serious squabbling with each other.

Yanjing is one of the two best builds for going north and outflanking the French/Danish forces that are ready to come sweeping down, on Arabia but perhaps also on China.

Yes, I think China should defend the north much more aggressively.

As predicted, Wagadu disbanded the army.

Indeed.

France is going back to his habit of keeping a stock on hand. There is no place to build what he needs most : more forces in the Eastern Med. He'll have to get past the Byzantine log-jam there with what he

has.

There is NO need for another unit right now, I would have held it last year, but this year is fine.

My Thoughts:

France:

France is clearly dominating the game, both tactically and diplomatically. He is following a classic path to victory: he has a couple stooge allies who think that they can help him grow absurdly large but don't need to fear that he'd ever stab. Usually this path ends with the absurdly large power stabbing his erstwhile allies, and getting help from the disgusted parties on the other side of the board to get a victory. I have been thinking that Arabia would be the helper power, but it could be Sri V or China.

The challenge in a large variant, where you technically are still very far from the victory criterion, but still leading, is to set yourself up for the victory without being too obvious about it. We've talked before about France staking out the claim to Yugra, and now that is coming down to go after Central Asian centers. Similarly, taking Jerusalem establishes a claim to all of the Mediterranean. Make alliances with powers that are not essential to victory (like Germany) or too difficult and in a faraway corner to take out (like Denmark) and attack those who occupy territory you need to have (like Byzantium). The "helper power" model is possible, but you only need it if you get stymied working with your allies. I don't see a need to stab Germany or Denmark ever, and I think there still is a French path to victory. France here just needs to be flexible. And unmerciful to anyone who crosses him.

The Stooges:

Germany and Denmark:

I don't really have separate thoughts for these guys. They are playing a Rosencrantz and Guildenstern game. They think that their combined strength will prevent any possibility of a French stab. I seem to recall things didn't work out quite so well for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100519/>

Yes, they're still dead.... I beg to differ though. I think that Germany is the one bearing the greater risk (of being stabbed) and still could be eliminated. I make the stupendously bold prediction that Denmark survives to the end of the game. Only Sri Vijaya, Denmark, and France are ensured of that at this point, in my view. China is a special case in that, of which more in a moment. Germany is entirely compactly placed, between France and Denmark, in one place on the board. Denmark spans from Yugra to the southern part of the Atlantic seas and even if stabbed has all sorts of interesting possibilities of things to do.

Axum:

a.k.a. Stabby McStabberson.

*He's stabbed Wagadu, then Egypt, then Wagadu again, then Arabia (twice?) and rumor has it (*cough*) that he's stabbing Sri V in the next move. The only thing he hasn't done is stab France. Not that he really could get much out of such a move - but if he'd bothered to work with Spain and/or Byz he'd have a much better position in Northern Africa.*

You're talking about B. here, B. is aggressive, he's an attacker. So he attacks. He does get provoked, though, once Arabia stabbed the Samanid and proved himself unreliable, only THEN did Axum stab Arabia. I think the biggest question in this game is why Axum seemingly never talks to Byzantium, and why they can't work together against France.

Axum has pursued a strategy that has gained him control of Africa, which gives him a minority position smack in the middle between France and the Easties. At the beginning of the game, I ruminated about what players should do in central positions. Basically, my philosophy about central powers is that they should work together to seek corner powers. If you have a central power and you squabble with the other central powers, then even if you win, all that you'll achieve is that you'll be the biggest guy in the middle, destined to be squished by whatever survivors you have from the regional wars in the corners.

I agree with this strategy in general, though like all general strategies, it has its exceptions. Matt's attempt to get Arabia to a side/corner through the Samanid was a complete disaster. It really doesn't help to try to GET to a side/corner and fail. Then you're pretty much dead.

Axum has flied in the face of my thinking. He's also rejected my logic of Triple Ententes, which work well in large map variants. Basically, in a large map variant, you have to address the long-term need of moving into other parts of the board at an early stage. If you much around with your neighbors and distant powers form a Triple, they will come knocking on your door before you have the ability to project power out of your region. In

this game, the (admittedly absurdly unbalanced) triple has made its presence known in Europe, and can project power into Africa whenever France feels like it. On the other side, Axum faces the rock-solid Eastie alliance. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Axum has responded by forming short-term alliances of convenience.

This strategy is particularly ineffective unless you can infect (and I use that word very much on purpose) the rest of the game with it so that everyone is forming short-term convenience alliances. When everyone is doing that, one can rotate through them, gaining with each round. B. is an expert at this strategy and he has been playing it rather masterfully. In order to progress at it, he needs to stab someone different. As Rick suggests, we have some semi-inside information that the next stab is of Sri Vijaya, and indeed this is the logical stab for Axum to make, not as dysfunctional as Rick makes it out to be. Nevertheless, it will not lead to long run Axum success.

In my experience, this kind of play rarely leads to triumph. Often it leads to a just-world scenario, where all of the wronged powers simply put aside their differences long enough to eliminate the Stabby. But sometimes the chronic stabber does manage to stick around long enough to reach the endgame, where his position will be too large to remove. So while the Stabby game rarely results in victory, it can suffice to make a draw.

Note that I left Axum out of my survivors list. Axum still could be completely eliminated, but this is why Sri Vijaya should be stabbed next. Axum cannot take out Sri Vijaya (even if China were to help), but it can stave off an Axum elimination. Then, maybe, just perhaps, if ever the board decided to form a stop-the-leader, Axum could lead it.

Arabia:

Arabia dominated the early game and appeared to have a triple alliance going with Axum and Samanid that would have allowed them to sweep the board. But just when Samanid was cracking the Chinese position, Arabia went for the short-term stab, and killed all of his diplomatic capital for a few SCs that he'll be hard-pressed to hold.

Arabia does have an advantage, though, that is easy to overlook considering the number of hostile powers. He actually has a good collection of central SCs that are difficult to reach from the various other sides of the board. Also, he has the implicit power of being able to throw the game to France (far more easily than the Easties can). But on the Diplomatic side, Arabia has never been able to do anything to break the Eastie alliance. And once the Byz shield collapses, he'll be facing serious Westie pressure.

It's a very interesting position. Clearly his advantage was thrown away with the stab which failed miserably.

But if he could ever get anybody to fight France, it's a position that could rebound. (Not that I really expect that to happen, since the various relationships seem to have calcified - at least, those relationships not involving Axum, this game's social butterfly).

I've often been saying that Arabia is headed for elimination. This is partly because even if he were throwing the game to France (trying to give France all his central Asian centers) it still would fall short to French victory, so Arabia would be eliminated with France still short of victory. That changes year by year, though, so we may reach a point where Arabia has REAL throw weight. Many powers will have throw weight then, and maybe the game will change, maybe not.

Byzantium:

We've spent much of the game applauding the Byzantine tactics, but he's really up the creek now. France has more fleets in the Med and has pushed beyond any lines that can feasibly be held. Byz desperately needs the Westie alliance to crack, but we have no signs of that happening anytime soon. Byz has made only one mistake: conveying his army off the boot when France suckered him into thinking he'd betray his Westie stooges. On the whole, I've admired his play, but we have seen nothing of his diplomacy, and as Jim has pointed out, the signs seem to be that it hasn't amounted to much.

One has to question if Gregory has really been talking at all (except to give Kiev his marching orders). This has been a diplomatic disaster for Byzantium from every quarter. Nothing really interesting all game has come from that position, except reliably effective tactical

defenses.

Sri V and China:

These guys have been marching in lockstep for pretty much the whole game. While I admire the alliance, I think they've needed to somehow recruit a third member to be of use to them. Well, they have involved Axum somewhat, but that's like getting a Promise Keeper ring from Britney Spears.

Right, I wonder if China swallowed the ring??

The main problem that these guys have is that there just are not that many SCs in Asia, and it's essentially impossible for them to expand their power into the other areas of the map. I see that as a variant design flaw (common to many large map variants). Either the game will end with both of them in a draw or France will get a victory in a situation where they are helpless to stop it. That cannot be much fun.

I commiserate with them. China needs to start opposing France in the north, now. He seems to have thought of this.

Dying powers:

Russia and Wagadu are squatting on SCs along the front lines, and neither looks to be in this game for much longer.

The Wagadu keep the fleet to be interesting. The Kievians have nothing interesting to do. They will both likely be dead this upcoming game year.

Have I forgotten anybody? Are the Indians still alive? ☺

Knives and Daggers

The Diplomacy World Letter Column



Mike Morrison – I would like to propose my own “Perfect Voting System” for Diplomacy.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about whether anonymous draw votes should be allowed at Diplomacy tournaments. Open draw votes have also been questioned. In fact, some believe draw votes are a sissy option that should never be allowed under any circumstances, and in the event of a theoretical “stalemate”, all players should be required to continue until one or another, or they all, misorder.

In the interest of providing a solution that will please no one, I would like to see two rounds of voting before each game: an open round on whether to allow anonymous

draw votes, and an anonymous vote on whether to allow open draw votes. The results of these should be discarded, and a 3-sided coin flipped to determine the winner of the game: France, Turkey, or Italy. Then all can go out for pizza.

[[While I am all for reasonable proposals Mike, you fail to address how the group then decided or in the inclusion or exclusion of pizza toppings.

And what of the beverages to accompany the pizza? Water? Iced tea (sweetened or unsweetened)? Beer? So many unanswered questions. You need to think this through a bit more!]]