

Diplomacy World #158



Summer 2022 Issue
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Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Summer 2022 issue. I'm just sitting here in my living room, trying to stay cool as the Dallas area "enjoys" yet another day of over 100-degree heat. I have a tendency to get introspective, nostalgic, and a bit melancholy on days like today when I'm alone with my thoughts.

That's been even more true lately, as I've been collecting notes to write another memoir, this one being about my siblings and our childhood. Whether that book ever sees the light of day remains to be seen. At this stage it will initially be just for my brothers and sisters.

But it's sent my mind back over the years. Buying my first set of Diplomacy at Roy's Toy and Hobby Shop in Summit, NJ. That was such a great store, where I bought many of my favorite Avalon Hill games including Kingmaker, Storm Over Arnhem, and Civilization.

Part of my enjoyment of those games, and the gaming hobby at large, was through the pages of the Avalon Hill magazine **The General**. Through the articles, series replays, and designer notes contained therein I discovered all kinds of new games, and found some direction in how to best play them. It was in the Opponents Wanted section that I saw an ad for play by mail Diplomacy (in Shawn Erikson's zine **Victim's Wanted**) which allowed me to discover the Diplomacy hobby. And thanks to that magazine, and that one ad, I've spent hundreds upon hundreds of hours writing letters, planning strategies, reading zines, sending emails, and making friends that I never would have otherwise.

I mention this for two reasons. One is because Lewis Pulsipher's terrific series of Diplomacy articles which originally appeared in *The General* will be reprinted here in **Diplomacy World** for those of you who never had a chance to see them. The first of those, as well as a brief introduction, can be found on Page 5. You'll find the 2nd and 3rd part in future issues of **Diplomacy World**.

The second reason I mention this is the last item in my list above. Making friends. I've made so many friends during my years in this hobby (the number of years is frightening, in a way...this is now the 19th year I've been Lead Editor of **Diplomacy World**, if you combine my two periods together). Some, like David Hood, you still find

within these pages. Some, like Jack McHugh or Paul Milewski or Richard Weiss, have moved on from the hobby and are either completely out of it or only peripherally involved. Many of the friends I made are no longer with us. That list grows. Fred Hyatt, Jim Burgess, Phil Reynolds, John Schultz...I could fill this entire column with names and memories.

I just feel like there are still too many Diplomacy players who are missing the opportunity to meet people – in person or virtually – and form friendships. A standard game of Diplomacy requires seven people, and success should involve negotiation and communication. Therefore, by its very design, Diplomacy is a **social** game. Of course, the tactical side of the game is important. And through Gunboat, you can focus on just that aspect. Sadly, especially on some of the online sites, it seems like too many players are forgetting there are real people in the other six seats. I guess the anonymity of on-line handles and virtual play can make that easy to do. But I hope you each take a moment to consider all you might be missing if you view the game as one where you're the star, and everyone else is just a nameless supporting player. Not everyone you play with is going to wind up being your friend, but nobody you play with will if you don't make some kind of effort to interact.

I want to thank everyone who continues to send in articles and support this publication. I'm sometimes amazed that we're still able to put out quality issues four times a year. Without your help – and that includes you, dear reader – Diplomacy World would have disappeared long ago. Still, I'm here asking for **more** help, **more** support. New blood, new energy, new ideas, new articles, new contributors. The **Diplomacy World Staff** section has carried vacancies on it for so long, they feel like they've become permanent. I don't know what else to do at this point except express my appreciation, and beg for your indulgence.

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

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

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Knives and Daggers - The Diplomacy World Letter Column

 **Lewis Pulsipher** – I have never favored variants for large numbers of players, as they exacerbate most of the problems of Diplomacy as a design, such as length. Nonetheless, Bob Durf's "How Bigger isn't Always Better" is one of the best Diplomacy articles I've ever read.

Paul Webb's article about testing variations on standard Dip with a bot is also very interesting. Though I am ever skeptical of any play without negotiation, whether with humans or bots. Without negotiation there is no "Invisible Hand" to help the inner powers (that is, the outer powers tend to give the inner a break and worry more about the other outer powers), naturally providing some balance).

Maps meant to balance Diplomacy with tweaks face the fundamental problem: powers at the edges of the map have big advantages over powers on the inside. So why not give the insiders four units to start with (and even four centers???) and leave EFT with three? Or possibly leave the Inners as is and take away one unit (not center?) from each of EFTR at start?

[[I'm told that for the last few years, Turkey is just about the weakest power in tournament play. It seems modern players see Turkey as a major threat, so A/R or A/I (or A/I/R) often proactively wipe Turkey off the map before squabbling amongst themselves. That sort of human element is lost when you run bot results. Of course, these tendencies ebb and flow over time. If Turkey continues to perform poorly (on average), players will stop worrying about that corner of the board, and it will soon see improved results.]]

 **Hugh Polley** – Mega-Variants: Or How Bigger Isn't Always Better by Bob Durf: This article hits many of the points I designed my Engineer variant rules to overcome. In my only World Map Mega test of the rules with 15 players signed up, they worked; it ended with a three-way if memory serves, but one player could have gone for broke with a decent chance for victory. Engineer Units allowed for building on non-home centers and changing unit types, from armies to navies to Fighters. The Fighters enabled one to break through stalemate lines. The Civil Disorder rule handled NMR very effectively. Finally, I successfully ran the game with my adjudicator resulting in very few GM mistakes.

[[NMRs are an interesting question. In my games I never allow NMRs in the opening season (delaying the game when that happens, and assigning a replacement). But as the game progresses, I find myself of two opinions. One is that NMRs suck and should be avoided whenever possible. But the other is that NMRs can often be predicted. If it's a game where the players properly communicate with each other, changes in frequency of those communications (and changes in their substance) can suggest the player is more likely to NMR in an upcoming game turn. If you liken that occurrence to a government struggling to maintain power, it can change the way you plan for the future, and sometimes even lead you to attack someone. Maybe the game is better off with that possibility included.]]

 **Paul Milewski** – About Paul Webb's article on page 19 (in **Diplomacy World** #157). I am not familiar with Diplomacy played by bots. Obviously, we are talking about Gunboat played by machines--no negotiations, no press, no human element. Do bots always make the same spring 1901 moves for whichever of the 7 positions they are playing? How does one know that Albert is the "best playing bot not made by Google" and why exclude bots made by Google if there are any?

[[There are actually bots that are more advanced than you're suggesting here, but I'll let Paul respond directly if he'd like.]]

 **Harold Reynolds** - I am writing to ask if any **Diplomacy World** readers are interested in collaborating with me to update the Diplomacy A-Z, which has been gathering dust since July, 2008. Many of the entries relating to Personalities need to be updated, especially for those who have passed away. New entries need to be created for various electronic gaming platforms and other advances in technology, as well as for people who ought to be recognized for whatever reason. The A-Z, whose existence can be largely blamed on Mark Nelson, can be found at <https://badpets.net/Diplomacy/AtoZ/index.html>, and I can be reached at hjreynolds2 at rogers.com.

[[Just the kind of project I would have bene drawn to in my earlier days. Unfortunately, I'm not familiar enough with the newer generation of players. I'm hanging on by a threat as it is!]]

An Introduction to My Diplomacy Articles in “The General”

By Lewis Pulsipher

A very long time ago, I wrote a series of three articles for *The Avalon Hill General*, the magazine of the Avalon Hill Company. Avalon Hill began the modern hex-and-counter gaming hobby. Such classics as *Stalingrad* and *Afrika Korps* were among its early releases. In time it acquired *Diplomacy*, most unlike hex and counter games, from Games Research. Don Greenwood, very well-known game developer and recently retired as director of the World Boardgaming Championships, was editor of **The General** while I was writing for it.

Avalon Hill went out of business (owing to bad management, which I'm sure Don rightly still complains about) in 1997; Hasbro acquired the remnants, including *Diplomacy*. But for long thereafter my articles were on the Avalon Hill website, and were linked on the front page of the Boardgamegeek page for *Diplomacy*.

That is no longer true, though the articles are now on my website (pulsiphergames.com) and possibly elsewhere on the Web. While reading DW #153 it suddenly occurred to me that most DW readers probably have not seen this series, so here we are.

Keep in mind, this series was written some 40 years ago, so my comments about the state of the hobby and typical opening moves are out of date. At that time, you either played Dip face to face, or by USPS snail mail with games taking three years or so. Online games did not exist, FTF tournaments were much less common (than before the pandemic).

You'll also notice that the first piece includes an introduction from Don Greenwood (unless Doug decides to leave that out).

The Art of Negotiation in Diplomacy Part 1 of 3 (Reprinted from *The General*, vol. 18, #1) by Lewis Pulsipher

There are those who don't consider Diplomacy a wargame. Indeed, there are Diplomacy players who share that opinion. Diplomacy enthusiasts have always been a breed apart from the mainstream of the hobby. Long before Diplomacy became an Avalon Hill product the wargame hobby was generally seen to consist of three branches: board games, miniatures, and Diplomacy. The game thrives on the fact that it requires seven players and is better suited to postal than live play, factors which would certainly have condemned a lesser game long ago. Despite its age, every major game convention has a Diplomacy tournament. To that end, we offer a three-part series on the game with no dice by one of the giants of the Diplomacy community in the 1970s and 80s. You decide whether it is or isn't a wargame.
- Don Greenwood

The heart of Diplomacy is negotiation between seven players who represent the Great Powers of World War I: Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Turkey. Facilitating the negotiations are the simple mechanics of simultaneous movement of a total of 34 armies and fleets, with no luck involved. Deals and alliances are made and broken during the game, and no one can be certain whether other players will react as

expected; in other words, the players themselves provide the chance element.

It is a mark of a great game, such as chess, that experts cannot agree on a best way to play. Diplomacy is no exception. Consequently, the advice below is my view of how to play successfully. Others would disagree, as I sometimes indicate. Some points will be expanded and clarified in the articles on the other two major elements of Diplomacy play, strategy and tactics.

Telling someone how to negotiate well is a difficult task. A person's attitude toward life and toward the game have a strong, immeasurable, and probably unalterable effect on how, and how well, he or she negotiates in any wargame. Hundreds of essays have been written about this subject. Certain principles and common failings can be described, however, which no player should ignore.

The advice below applies to any well-played Diplomacy game, but it is necessary to recognize the differences between face-to-face (FTF) and postal or electronic play. When you play FTF with people you don't know, you will often encounter attitudes and conventions very different from your own. In the extreme, what you think is perfectly commonplace might be, to them, cheating. In

postal play with experienced opponents, you'll encounter fewer "strange" notions. Incompetent players can be found in any game, of course. Postal games suffer from failure of players to submit orders before the adjudication deadline -- "missed moves" -- far more than FTF games. A failure to move at a crucial time usually causes significant changes in the flow of play. Both FTF and postal games suffer from dropouts -- people who quit playing before their countries are eliminated. Part of a good player's range of skills is the ability to keep his allies (and his enemy's enemies) from dropping out. In a top-class game none of these difficulties occur.

In FTF play it is easier to coordinate routine attacks and to form coalitions to stop the largest country from winning. Communication is more rapid and more frequent than by mail. More elaborate and brilliant tactical play is found in postal games because each player has hours, if he desires, to look for the very best moves. Time-pressure often causes tactical mistakes in FTF games. Finally, dogged persistence of argument is valuable in FTF, where a weak player might do whatever he was most recently told to do. In postal play, persistence (via numerous letters and long-distance phone calls) is valuable, but written negotiation requires a more careful, logical approach than oral negotiation. Every player has time to think things through, to notice holes in arguments, to hear from every player. No one can monopolize one person's time.

When you begin a game, you must first learn something about each of your opponents. Sometimes you will know quite a bit to begin with, but you can also ask people who know the opponent better than you do. You want to know if your opponent is generally reliable or not, what his objective is, whether he is a classical or romantic player, and whether or not he is good at negotiation, strategy, and tactics. (This is a controversial point, insofar as some players -- usually the notoriously erratic and unreliable -- say that a player's previous record should have no effect on the game. The more you know about another player, however, the better you'll be able to predict his actions. It would require a peculiar view of life for a player to knowingly ally with someone who has never abided by an agreement in 20 games! Similarly, you have little to gain by offering a draw to a player who would "rather die than draw." However much some players like to pretend that they really are government leaders and that World War I is happening just this once, most Diplomacy players recognize that it is an abstract game of skill and act accordingly.)

Let's consider each point you're trying to learn about, beginning with reliability. Novice players, urged on by the rulebook introduction, usually believe that the winner will be the player who lies, cheats, and backstabs most effectively. Perhaps if you never play more than once with the same people and never acquire a reputation,

this would be true. In the long run, players learn to treat liars and backstabbers as enemies. Why invite disaster in an already difficult game?

For one person to do well in a game with six competitors, some cooperation is necessary. Cooperation is easier and more effective between those who can rely upon one another. An expert player rarely lies, and then only because the lie is likely to radically improve his position. He prefers to say nothing, to change the subject, to speak of inconsequential things, rather than lie. When he agrees to an alliance of some kind he usually abides by the agreement. By specifying a limited duration -- until 190x, or until a particular country is eliminated or reduced to one supply center -- he won't back himself into a corner that would require him to break an agreement. When he backstabs (attacks) an ally, he plans it so as to virtually destroy the country, not merely to gain a few centers. The stab is a means to accomplishing his goal, not merely to increasing his supply center count. He wants to be known as a reliable player because this will make other players more willing to cooperate with him.

Some players say that only mutual self-interest should determine whether an agreement is kept or a lie told. When the agreement is no longer in one player's interest, he should break it. In the short term this might also be true (though a lie or backstab early in a game will certainly be remembered to the end of that game, often to the detriment of the perpetrator). The expert player looks at the long term, because few people play just one game of Diplomacy. It is in his interest to maintain agreements and avoid lying in order to establish a reputation for reliability. No altruism is involved. (Incidentally, a reliable player is less often on the receiving end of an emotional barrage from an angry player -- no small gain.)

It is often surprising to new players to learn that not every player wants to accomplish the same thing. Some play for excitement, not caring if they win or lose as long as the game is full of wild incidents. Most play to win the game, but there the ways part. Many players (the "drawers") believe that, failing to win, a draw is the next best result, while anything else is a loss. At the extreme, even a 7-way draw is better than second place. Others (the "placers") believe that to survive in second place while someone else wins is better than a draw. At the extreme are those who would "rather die than draw." Such fundamental differences in world view can have a decisive effect on a game. If you propose a plan to establish a 3-way draw, a placer won't be interested. If you offer to help a weak country to attain second place if he helps you win, you'll get nowhere if he's a drawer but a placer would be favorably impressed. Placers make better "puppets," but drawers can also be good allies. In some situations they are better, because they won't

abandon you (when they feel they can't win) in order to try for second place instead of a draw. When you're winning, you're better off with a placer ally, who is a little less likely to attack you than a drawer would be.

Whether a player's style is "classical" or "romantic" is tricky to define. Briefly, the classical player carefully maximizes his minimum gain. He pays attention to detail and prefers to patiently let the other players lose by making mistakes, rather than trying to force them to make mistakes. He tends to like stable alliances and steady conflict in the game. He tends to be reliable and good at tactics. The romantic is more flamboyant, taking calculated risks to force his enemies into mistakes, trying to defeat them psychologically before they are defeated physically on the board. (Many players give up playable positions because they're convinced that they've lost.) He tries to maximize his maximum gain, at the cost of increasing potential loss. He can be unpredictable, relying on surprise and the Great Stab for victory. Tending to be an unreliable ally and a sometimes-sloppy tactician, he likes fluid, rapidly changing alliances and conflicts.

Finally, it's useful to know whether your opponent is a poor, average, or good player, and what facets of the game he is better at. You can risk a one-on-one war with a poor tactician but not with a good one. An alliance of limited duration with a player who is deficient in strategy can leave you in a much better position as you outmaneuver him in dealing with the players on the other side of the board. Some players like to eliminate inferior players early in the game, while others try to use the weaker players as buffers or to eliminate strong opponents.

To reemphasize the point of this "sizing up," the more you know about your opponent's tendencies, the better you can predict his reaction to a given situation. As you negotiate, try to learn more about his preferences. In the extreme case, you can try to make yourself appear to be a certain kind of player in order to gain the respect, trust, or sympathy of your opponent. Even if you begin a game with six unknown quantities, you should be able to learn something about their styles before writing your Spring 1901 orders. Surprisingly, simply being friendly is sometimes the best approach; talk about yourself and your own views in order to draw out the other players.

There are five other principles of negotiation beyond "know your opponents:"

- talk with everybody
- be flexible
- never give up
- explain plans thoroughly, and
- be positive.

1) At the beginning of the game, and periodically throughout, talk with all the other players, even your enemies. Someone on the other side of the board may know something of interest to you. Trade information, when possible, with those who have no immediate stake in what you do next. Don't be too free with the information you obtain or it may get back to your source, who will decide he can't trust you with more. An expert player takes account of and tries to control the actions of every player in the game. You he can't do that if you don't communicate with them.

2) If you expect everyone to play the way you do, you'll surely lose. Don't get emotional, though it isn't necessarily bad to simulate some emotion in order to change an opponent's behavior. It is only a game, and betrayal is a part of it. If you are stabbed or someone lies to you, anger will do you no good. What you can do is make sure your antagonist regrets his action, with the idea that next time, he'll remember and won't do it again. (Advocates of short-term Diplomacy go even further. They say forget about the stab and think only about what is in your interest this moment. Your best ally might be the player who just betrayed you.) When you are at war, always think about possible deals with your enemy, especially if he has the upper hand! No rule says you must fight to the bitter end. You might both be better off doing something besides fighting each other, such as jointly attacking a third country or separately attacking two other countries. Always have an alternative plan in case things go wrong. Humans, especially Diplomacy players, can be erratic.

3) Keep negotiating with your enemy even as he wipes you out. You may be more useful to him as a minor ally than as an enemy. As long as you have a unit, you can affect the course of the game. There have been postal games in which a player reduced to two supply centers later won, and in FTF games even one-center countries have come back to win. In the fluid conditions of many games, dramatic reversals of fortune are common.

4) When you've sized up your opponents and selected your strategy, make your approach. Explain in detail and at length what you expect both you and your potential ally to accomplish. If he can't see any advantage in what you propose, he won't accept -- or more likely, he'll pretend to agree and then use the information against you. Some players prefer to be noncommittal, to get the feel of things during the first season or first game year. Others like to form solid alliances as soon as possible. Whichever you prefer, be sure you put effort into your attempts to come to agreements with others. Even if you intend to break the agreement, back it with plausible reasons. If things go wrong, you may find yourself relying on an agreement you intended to break. If you don't seem interested in the agreement when you

propose it, the other player won't bite. For example, when you propose an offensive alliance, don't merely say "Let's you and me get him." That isn't negotiation, it is an invitation to be treated as an inferior. Instead, talk about why it is in the interest of both countries to eliminate a common enemy, how it can be accomplished (tactics), what other countries will probably do (strategy), how the spoils will be divided, and what each of you can do afterward to avoid fighting each other. If the attack doesn't give both of you prospects for gain, your potential ally will be suspicious, especially if the alliance appears to favor him over you.

5) Convince the other player, don't passively hope that his ideas coincide with yours. Negotiation is a strange mixture of aggressive persuasion and play-acting to seem innocuous, to avoid drawing too much attention to yourself.

However, you go about it, don't be discouraged by initial failures, and always analyze why you succeed or fail. There's no substitute for experience.

In the next installment we'll examine strategy in Diplomacy.

Dixiecon 2022 Narrative Report

By Tournament Director David Hood

Two years was a long time NOT to have a face-to-face Dixiecon tournament. For that reason, I was very much looking forward to hosting the event again in its usual venue in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, just like I had done for decades. I was also looking forward to welcoming many folk for the first time, including those who joined the wider hobby during the Covid pandemic and who had mostly been playing online or virtual face to face. (I think we ended up with thirteen such first-timers, including the eventual tournament winner.)

Of course, what I really was NOT expecting was for my venue of the last twenty of so years to throw obstacles in my path about a month before the event. No need to dwell on the details, but the bottom line was that we could not hold Dixiecon at the dormitory building as usual. That meant a last-minute scramble for new lodging and a new room for the tournament itself. Luckily, the AC by Marriott, about two blocks from our usual site, had both guest rooms and meeting space available. While it was a tight fit, it turned out generally OK. I was very concerned about the increased cost for everyone, but luckily, I did not even have to tap into the funds that several hobbyists offered to contribute should other attendees not be able to afford the increases. (Thanks, y'all know who y'all are.)

So anyway, Dixiecon was in a new location, had a lot of new players, but we were up to our old tricks as far as the gaming goes! The Thursday night crowd is usually small, but this year was a much larger group. In addition to dinner and socializing, several board games hit the tables including Finstere Flure, Dune Imperium, Ethnos, Catan, Alhambra, Just One, Snatch-It and Unmatched, to go along with the ubiquitous Terraforming Mars and the new "Con game" of the weekend, Space Base. I was particularly happy to see folk who did not yet know each other well begin to form new face to face

friendships while attacking Arrakeen, building the Longest Road, giving one-clues to the player trying to guess the answer, etc.



Hugo Max Fairbanks During Open Gaming

Friday morning, I got a call about 8am from Hudson Defoe wanting to know whether all the other Terraforming players were - he and Ecton were down in the tournament room looking for a Mars Smackdown. I frankly did not know what to say to that rather early inquiry, but whatever - I do know that Hud and Brian got into a TM game shortly thereafter with one Hugo Max Fairbanks so that was awesome. As the day wore on, more and more folk began to arrive - which always leads to great "so that's who you are in real life" type comments and general fun. Gaming also continued during the hours preceding the 6pm start to the tournament proper - I saw games of Titan, Red Cathedral, Alhambra, Battlore, Catan, Roborally and Axul among others.

Round One of the Diplomacy tournament started right at six o'clock, with general announcements, the giving of

awards from past Dixiecons (I think the oldest we gave out this year was a Best Country to Randy Lawrence-Hurt from 2016) and then the reading of the four boards for Diplomacy. This year all the games were named for North Carolina-based minor league baseball teams. DBN coverage was pretty thorough of all twelve boards of Dip played over the weekend, so I won't get real deep into that here, but suffice it to say that three of these boards ended relatively early...while the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers game did not. Went to about 5am Saturday morning as the eventual AI of Kirk Vaughn and Jaromir Sulja ground down the rest of the powers and then each took shots for a solo before agreeing to a three way draw with Cameron Higbe's England.

personally, but it certainly started with a bang as it also doubled as the Team Tournament round. In the Fayetteville Woodpeckers game, Karl Ronneburg took the top score with a 12 center England in a three-way, while Brandon Fogel and Ed Sullivan as ER nabbed a two-way draw in the Gastonia Honey Hunters game. Not to be out-two-wayed, Brian Ecton and Steven Hogue also achieved that result in the Greensboro Grasshoppers game, wintergreening an alliance of Russia and Italy.

During the day Saturday, the non-Dip gaming continued apace, with play of Champions of Midgard, Chess, My Little Scythe (no, really), Catan, and that old Dixiecon staple Outpost. The separate Terraforming tournament also notched several boards as Dippers were escorted out of their games by their neighbors, or after early game finishers freed up players.



Jaromir Sulja and Todd Craig

The Iron Man tournament also started at 6pm, an event which amalgamates the scores from all the non-Dip gaming over the weekend using a secret sauce scoring system designed by Assistant Tournament Director Michael Lowrey. Titles played during the Friday night action included Splendor, Power Grid, Space Base, Dune Imperium and Pillars of the Earth (featuring two Hoods not named David as players.)

After that Cannon Ballers Extravaganza, the Saturday morning round seemed to start really early for me



Cameron Higbe Accepting the Players Choice Award (Presented by David Hood)

5pm on Saturday saw the traditional BBQ feast enjoyed by one and all. A minor quibble with our otherwise wonderful DBN coverage - there was plenty of cole slaw, the cabbage of which I'm pretty sure constitutes a leafy green vegetable. Plus, the fried cornbread and potato

salad and chips and...OK maybe not a vegetarian's delight now that I think about it. Next year I'll encourage folk to BYOK (Bring Your Own Kale.) After the BBQ, we settled into some great socializing and continued Iron Man gaming - including Nations, Outpost, Space Base, Magic The Gathering, Terraforming, Hearts, Factory Manager, Here I Stand, Twilight Struggle, Splendor, Dune Imperium, and The Amazing Labyrinth (whew!)



Brandon Fogel Wins! David Hood (left) Presents the Award

Going into Sunday morning it was pretty clear who the favorites were given the two ways achieved in Round Two. Would anyone be able to improve their standing in the timed Round Three games? Frankly, not really. It may take newer folk some time to realize how fast you

have to move in the Sunday round to get a decent score - and next year I intend to help this process along by starting earlier on Sunday and dropping negotiation times to 12 and then 10 minutes per turn in the early afternoon. After all the dust settled, my DBN partner in crime Brandon Fogel won his first Dixiecon with Brian Ecton taking second and another my DBN colleagues Ed Sullivan taking home the third-place plaque. Local player and PlayDip moderator Alex Ronke won the Iron Man tournament, by taking a break from Diplomacy at this year's Dixiecon, with longtime Maryland attendees Ed Rothenheber and Dan Mathias taking second and third in that event. The remaining awards from Dixiecon 2022 are listed below.

Thanks to all those attending the 36th annual Dixiecon, from hither and yon, and thanks very much to those who watched the coverage on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network. Also, thanks to Michael for his scoring work, and many of you for conducting draw votes, playing in a round when I need you to, etc. As far as next year goes, I want to say that I've been listening to your feedback on the event, as I always have. The changes for Round Three I mentioned above are overdue, I think. I plan to be more intentional next year about making sure our newcomers are welcomed into the socializing and dinner trips from the word go - if you want to help me in that regard as a Dixiecon Ambassador, please contact me directly. Also, I'll be starting in the Fall to look for alternative venues. Even though the hotel folks could NOT have been nicer or more accommodating, if we want to host Dipcon or otherwise build attendance much beyond the 45 or so we had in the gaming area this year, we will need more space.

My final comment: if you enjoyed your experience, please tell a friend and then bring them next year. Also, consider attending one of our other Diplomacy events on the 2022 calendar - we have many coming up. If you want to try virtual Face to Face like you've seen on DBN, there is the Summer Classic tournament in late July as well as regular League games available through the Tour of Britain and the Virtual Diplomacy League. Above all, stay in contact with the new friends you made, to strengthen and grow our hobby that way.

Brandon	Fogel	Illinois	380	
Brian	Ecton	Maryland	376	
Ed	Sullivan	Texas	340	
Randy	Lawrence-Hurt	North Carolina	336	
Steven	Hogue	Kentucky	332	
Karl	Ronneburg	New York	332	
Brad	Blitstein	Vermont	304	
Ben	Kellman	Michigan	300	
Jaromir	Sulja	Ontario	285.7	
Jason	Mastbaum	California	266.9	
Kirk	Vaughn	Tennessee	266.9	
Cameron	Higbe	Missouri	234.9	
Tom	Kobrin	North Carolina	218.9	
Emmett	Wainwright	North Carolina	210.9	
Hal	Schild	Virginia	174	
Chris	Barfield	North Carolina	170.9	
Lauren	Lloyd	Scotland	157.7	
Hudson	Defoe	D.C.	140	
Alex	Craig	North Carolina	139	
Todd	Craig	North Carolina	131.7	
Doc	Binder	Florida	124.7	
Tarzan	Hertzberg	Pennsylvania	118.9	
Andy	Bartalone	Maryland	106.9	
Keith	Worstell	North Carolina	101.7	
Peter	Yeargin	Pennsylvania	92.9	
Greg	Fairbanks	D.C.	50	
Ben	Durfee	Georgia	18	
<u>Below this line: One Round Only So Ineligible to Place</u>				
Tyler	Mollenkopf	North Carolina	154	
Dave	Maletsky	D.C.	138	
Ed	Rothenheber	Maryland	138	
Tim	Richardson	Virginia	68.9	
Steve	Koehler	North Carolina	40	
Matt	Mendoza	D.C.	10	
Rick	Desper	Maryland	5	
Christian	Pedone	Pennsylvania	0	
Graham	Woodring	Maryland	0	

Best Austria	Kirk Vaughn
Best England	Ed Sullivan
Best France	Brian Ecton
Best Germany	Karl Ronneberg
Best Italy	Steven Hogue
Best Russia	Brandon Fogel
Best Turkey	Randy Lawrence-Hurt
<u>Death With Dignity</u>	
Hudson Defoe	
Alex Craig	
Ben Kellman	
Matt Mendoza	
Keith Worstell	
Players Choice	Cameron Higbe
I Got Hammered	Keith Worstell
Golden Blade	Alex Craig
The Brick	Greg Fairbanks
Virtual Brick	Jaromir Sulja (Cause don't fly to Canada with a Brick)
Terradipping Mar	Steve Koehler, Winner
	Andy Bartalone, Finalist
	Brian Ecton, Finalist
	Dave Malestky, Finalist
Team Tourney:	I Don't Know, I Got Nothing...Glenfiddich
	Hogue, Ronneburg, Vaughn
Iron Man	1-Alex Ronke
	2-Ed Rotheheber
	3-Dan Mathias

An Interview with Steven Hogue

by Randy Lawrence-Hurt

Randy

So, diving right into it: want to give us some background on how long you've been playing Diplomacy, and your prior FtF experience?

Steven

First ever game was a FtF at work in 2019 which played a turn a day at the office. (This was a mistake.) I played one other FtF game with mostly the same bunch for 6 hours at a game store. Then I decided to start going to tournaments aaaand...Covid. So I joined the virtual craze. My only other FtF was Whipping a month ago.

Randy

How would you describe the transition from Virtual to FtF?

Steven

Great question. I could honestly take up the whole interview talking about just that.

I think individual perspectives on the transition from virtual to FtF will vary, because people don't all operate in the same way. For my part, time management feels easier in FtF. Very seldom did I find myself in a hurry to get words out ahead of deadline, whereas that happens routinely in virtual play. Why is that? I think one part of it is people communicate more efficiently with eye contact and body language. If someone isn't liking your pitch, you can ascertain that sooner in the conversation, and likewise if they're on-board with what you are saying it is more obvious. Less time wasted with niceties of conversation.

Another distinction I've noticed - I find in FtF I get less worried by seeing other powers talking together without me. I think in virtual there's a psychological effect of them being "in a room together" on voice chat that always gives it this underpinning as if they're definitely scheming in there.

I also ran up against some gameplay meta differences between the virtual and FtF worlds, which is something that will happen when you cross from any gaming community to another. I was on the receiving end of an outburst of anger over a board at Dixie that turned every head in the room, and I think a lot of it was rooted in the fact my neighboring power had a long history of FtF and never expected someone to come into the game with the perspective I had. There was a bit of a clash of worlds going on, to say the very least.

The last thing I'll say is, for someone like me who learned to play mostly on Backstabbr's web interface, reading the position of the pieces on an actual physical board is a whole different challenge to overcome. Something worth getting used to if you're looking to make the transition from online play to FtF.

Randy

Very interesting insights, and I'm particularly fascinated by your take on seeing other players negotiating virtually versus in FtF. That definitely seems to be a common theme among players who make the transition from Virtual to FtF, that reading body language and seeing in real-time who's talking to who is a whole new dynamic they had to learn.

Steven

I think "being at the table alone" feels a bit lonelier in virtual, if that makes sense. Maybe one reason I worried less about other negotiations was related to me being more confident in what I had going because I was able to build trust with my allies better in FtF than virtual.

Randy

Makes sense. If there's one thing I think we've all learned from the last two years, it's that as nice as it is to have Zoom and video calls available, humans as a species relate to each other better face-to-face.

So let's talk about your boards. What happened in round one?

Steven

I was at my first round at my first in person DixieCon, and here was the board call:

Austria – Ben Kellman
England – Emmett Wainright
France – Hudson Defoe
Germany – Ed Sullivan
Italy – Doc Binder
Russia – Todd Craig
Turkey – Steven Hogue

Turkey. Could be worse. I'm not usually excited to play Turkey, but data doesn't lie, and historically I manage to find results with it one way or another. This isn't a bad power placement for Dixie's draw-based scoring. Just don't die. Cool.

So who is where? Ben in Austria is at the front of my mind immediately. We've played multiple boards together virtually in various settings, including several

experiences as eastern neighbors. We tend to flounder as AI and fight as AT, if I recall correctly. And Ben's result is usually better than mine.

Doc Binder in Italy of course garners mention. Safe to say he's the most experienced player on the board? And I have no clue what his style is like. I know that he's dabbled in virtual a little, but I don't recall any boards with him.

Russia is a total unknown to me, but no stranger to a diplomacy board – Todd Craig, a local nerd pal of David Hood's who has been at this event for decades.

I spoke with Russia first, as per custom, I suppose. Todd and I seemed to get along fine and ultimately agreed to bounce for now, and circle back later if something changed.

Ben, to my pleasant surprise, was gung-ho for an AT based on circumstantial meta about us knowing each other and having a couple of experienced unknowns in Italy and Russia. I supported the idea wholeheartedly, because it made sense but also because I was in no way interested in interfering with his perspective of the board which involved me having a power who isn't attacking me.

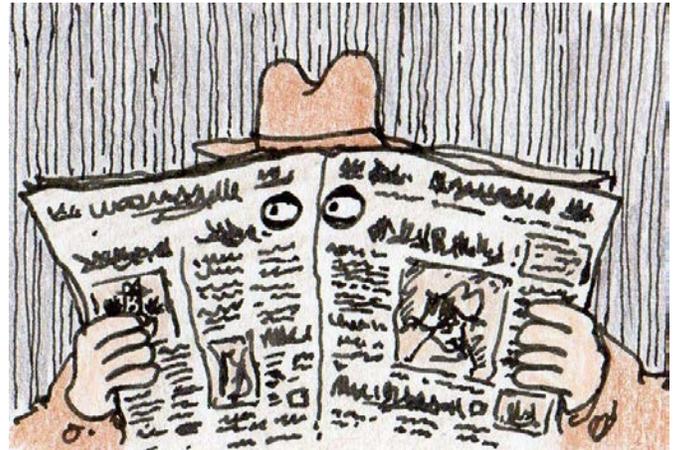
Doc sent both Italian armies north, lining up Tyrolia and Venice. Ben in Austria was clear and open with me about his concern regarding this opening. He didn't like Doc's pitch for how the move made sense as a standard opening that isn't strictly anti-Austrian.

During Fall 1901 negotiations, Doc asked if I'd be willing to cut Serbia. Ohhhh, yes I would, Doc. Yes, indeed. I was honest with him. I said I've played with Ben a good deal and I know he's a strong player, so I'd be happy to knock him down a peg immediately. I think Doc could tell I meant it, because I did mean it.

Craig and I took positions we liked (F Ank – Con, A Ukr – Rum, BLA vacant) while Italy supported an attack on Trieste, which was anticipated by Ben (A Ser S A Vie – Tri), however he had his Serbian support cut from my army in Bulgaria, so he picked up only a single build while Italy got two. Despite this flagrant collusion against him on my part, Ben was open in negotiations about the fact that he was angrier at the Italian than he was at the Turk. Basically, this all set up extremely well for me.

I played along with whatever it was Doc suggested we do, but then I took Ben's offer to support me out of Aegean into Ionian. From there, to make a long story short, RAT rolled west, Italy pointed out to Turkey how much opportunity was there for the taking once the stab happened, the stab happened, but rather than play it out to a good sized 3-way draw, I decided to just call it a

game when the west agreed to let me have the highest supply center count in the draw and Russia agreed to bow out. It was a decision that left points on the board in favor of a lovely round/night one experience.



Randy

Great stuff! Safe to say you were fine with leaving some points on the board in round one, and planned on going harder for them in round two?

Steven

I guess that's part of it, but it was a combination of reasons, really.

Once I stabbed, I could viscerally feel the dynamic around the table shift as everyone knew I was locked into a decent-at-worst result at that point. (Apt quote from Ben after the stab and before the draw proposal - "Steven, I think you might have just turned this game from a 6-way into a 4-way".) In a way, I just didn't like the prospect of being the one with the target hanging around my neck whilst slowly grinding out my buddies Todd and Ben for the next two hours. I dunno, something about lacking the killer instinct of a champion. (That's a nod to Ed Sullivan, if you didn't know.)

Part of it was also just me sincerely feeling like I'd screw it up somehow if I kept playing. I'm not all that experienced of a player generally speaking, and getting over that hump from 9-ish to 12-ish is something I'm still trying to figure out how to navigate.

I had the whole board agreeing I deserved the best score out of everyone (by virtue of having the most supply centers in the draw) so for me, that was enough of a moral victory that I was fine with calling it a game and heading to round two poised to take a shot at a higher standing.

Randy

That all makes sense. From a meta-tournament perspective, sometimes it makes sense to accept a less-

than-ideal result on one board, if it means you maintain relationships with other players, or even just get some more sleep.

So moving on to round two- how did that go for you?

Steven

Long sigh Round two was a doozy, LOL.

Austria - Lauren Lloyd
England - Steve Koehler
France - Ben Durfee
Germany - Chris Barfield
Italy - Steven Hogue
Russia - Brian Ecton
Turkey - Christian Pedone

"Don't lose hope when you have a bad start, and don't get too cocky when you have a good start."

This game is a testament to the old adage about Diplomacy being a game not of pieces, but of people.

I'd like to point out in advance, for the sake of the reader's perspective, that for this game I would later receive the Best Italy award to collective boos from the field of players. It really says a lot about what happened here.

How does something like that come about? Why was my result unpopular? I hate to bring up that four letter word: scoring systems, but I think it's relevant here.

In the Dixie scoring system, players can agree to an end result which does not include them even though they still have units on the board. Draw proposals can be made starting after Fall 1905 has been adjudicated, and the fewer players included in the draw at the end, the better their score.

What happened on this board was a rare outcome - a 2-way draw after 1905. Russia owned eight with its home centers plus Rumania and all the Turkish dots, and Italy owned seven with its home centers plus Greece, Tunis, Marseilles, and Spain. But that was enough to bring the game to a close. Let's unpack how that happened.

I have a feeling a key takeaway from this story ought to be that it isn't about making a situation that can't be tactically overcome, but rather making a situation where nobody capable of implementing such tactics cares to do so.

I had a 4-way draw in round 1. Dixie doesn't publish results while the tournament is ongoing, but since the scoring system is simple, I knew that with there being three 3-way draws, all nine of those players were ahead of me, and since my supply center count was highest in

my 4-way draw, I knew I was leading them, putting me in tenth place.

I had no prior impressions of any player on this board coming into it. Italy is by far my least experienced power, but I managed to top a VDL board as Italy recently, so I was feeling cautiously optimistic.

Lauren in Austria was a great ally right off the bat. Honest, to the point, faithful, helpful, understanding, I could go on. This was a welcome situation, as I generally prefer to just do an AI until it's no longer viable to do an AI.

Brian in Russia is a name I was aware of as a tournament player, mostly, I think, from having listened to DiplomacyCast. We also had a couple interactions earlier in the week, before the Diplomacy got started. I felt like he was a player I could work well with.

Christian in Turkey was someone I didn't know anything about, but I figured he was an experienced player when he said at the start of the game he supported reducing the time limit for negotiations.

Here's my attempt to sum up how the east played out from the Italian perspective - I wanted an AI, and I was asked to stay out of the Austrian backyard. I've gone on air criticizing Ven H as a Spring '01 order, so that wasn't happening. I went to France and requested a bounce in Piedmont. France would end up getting the requested bounce in Piedmont and a planned-DMZ bounce in the channel.

If AI are working together, next question is - Russia too? Brian's early impressions were clear: as Russia he prefers to take out Turkey first. It was easy to believe. In my personal experience, I think Italy tends to end up in a good position after an early AIR, regardless of which power I'm in at the time. As the Italian, it's easy to drive, because most of the time it means nobody is attacking you.

I basically let AR work on their own a lot and Lauren and I just knew to stay out of each other's dots.

In the west, EG came after France. When this happened, I had already established diplomatic relations with the French. The fact that I was the only one of their neighbors who was truly negotiating with them and allowing them any room to play would help me to consistently improve the position of my western front with virtually no resistance. I may not have found that diplomatic avenue had it not been for some sage advice from Ecton. I asked whether I should press in on France now or prop them up instead. He told me if I prop them up now, then I'll be invited later. That's precisely what happened.

As the east started to resolve, I think Christian felt I was the only shot he had at anyone turning, so he made some positional choices that maximized his value to me. Unfortunately for him, it was just a game where I could make steady gains and despite his fun offer of building tons of armies, I felt as though I had a great thing going.

Alright, so that's pretty much the early game. Turkey taken out and France getting propped up by the eastern triple.

Once it became clear that I would have a fleet presence in the Med, negotiations started with England. Steve, if I'm not mistaken, was a fill-in player who'd actually already left the premises that day under the impression that he wasn't needed. Hood had to call him back to fill the board. That's important to understand.

My plan was to keep England as a friend, keep Austria as a friend, let Russia do whatever Russia was doing, and improve my position against Germany for as long as possible, so as not to upset the status quo. This went more or less the way I hoped it would.

I think the board started to recognize it was either headed toward AIR or EIR, and then from there who knows what. Austria grew steadily suspicious of Russia and I for entirely valid positional reasons. England had a growing concern about losing all position to the AIR, also for entirely valid positional reasons. Germany was mostly concerned about being eliminated next.

Bad things happened to the two most potentially viable third powers at the same time. England was attacked by Germany and Russia, and went down from seven to five. Austria had Italy and Russia surrounding nearly every dot they owned.

It was during the aftermath of 1905 that a 3-way proposal came out of the west - Italy, Russia, Germany. I publicly vetoed it immediately. I felt like it was a preposterous result, to be honest. If I was taking a 3-way, it was going to include Austria, first of all. Plus, I was going to get several more supply centers before accepting that. As an almost facetious counter, I said I'd take a draw right now only if it was a 2-way. From there it just...continued to happen. There was no "pitch" to speak of. I was asked who, I somewhat systematically named the two largest powers, and nobody wanted to veto. Then we fetched the tournament director and everybody voted yes.

Don't let me speak for the other players, but it seemed like everyone had their own reasons. Steve had lost his opportunity for a solid result, and he'd already left the building thinking he was off the hook once that day. Lauren had been eliminated from the 5am board in

round 1 and saw her two allies unite in a front against her. Germany had just taken his shot at convincing the board he should stick around, and it had been shot down. France wasn't viable. Russia and Italy both voted yes to be pragmatic, not truly expecting it to go through.

But that's how it happened. I guess that's how you end up with a 2-way draw as Italy on seven supply centers. Interestingly, since a 2-way draw is worth 10 "centers" more than a 3-way draw, my result matched exactly the score of the best possible individual score in a 3-way draw (that is, a seventeen center 3-way).

Randy

That's fantastic. I mean, an abomination of a result, but a terrific explanation. Did you have any mixed feelings about the result afterwards?

Steven

I was absolutely full of mixed feelings for days afterward, to be honest.

Randy

I respect the honesty! I think a lot of Dip players (probably including myself) wouldn't think twice about it.

Alright, so that brings us to board three. You've had two pretty good rounds, you must be thinking you have a shot at winning the tournament?

Steven

Oh, yeah. It was at the front of my mind during round three board call for sure.

Randy

Were you hoping for any specific country or neighbors?

Steven

I don't think so. Not that I can recall. France was not a reassuring draw, though. There's something I must not get about France yet because I don't recall many good French results for myself.

Randy

Gotcha. Funny, I suspect most folks would be pretty pleased with a French draw for the last round.

So, you get a country you're not thrilled with - how do you approach round 3?

Steven

Round three is one I'd love to have back.

My short term goal was to work with Jason in Germany to move quickly against Brandon in England. The round was timed and we needed a result, so why not just go. Brandon was the tournament leader, and I was in a tie for fifth. I knew Jason would be aware of this. Not that I

necessarily feel like taking out the tournament leader is automatically good, but in this case I thought it would be something Jason could trust I'd be willing to do for good reasons. I thought he might like to take advantage of the tempo.

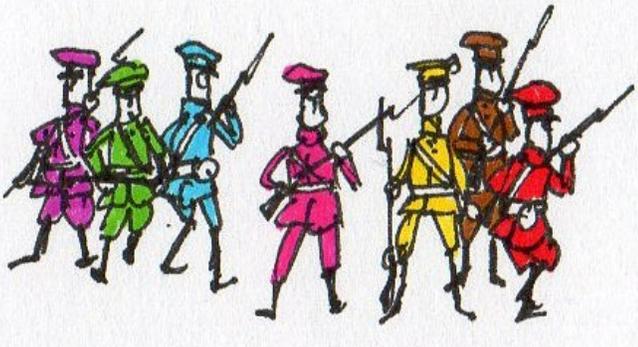
Randy

I'm guessing Jason didn't agree?

Steven

After taking the walk to Paris he told me "it just seemed like a good opportunity."

Once Jason moved in on me, I figured any chance of a result where I made a draw without Brandon was pretty much gone. From then on I was primarily playing to defend my standing in the tournament, A.K.A., keep the board from resolving.



Randy

If I recall correctly, this board ended in a 7-way draw, so sounds like you were pretty successful in that regard...

Steven

I think the board trended toward disorder as it went along, yeah. The timed round has that effect. Or can, and did in this case.

Randy

For anyone unfamiliar, how did it wrap up?

Steven

I dove into the Med as part of a bid to get EG to leave me alive. That upset Italy a lot. The east seemed messy. We nearly broke through Italy when time ran out on the game. Nobody could settle on a draw due to various grudges, so we ended with a 7-way draw.

Randy

You mentioned that round three is "one you'd like to have back" - what do you think you might've done differently (other than not trusting Jason)?

Steven

I could've used more proactive negotiation with Italy and Russia. I was too preoccupied with the west.

Additionally, I think there was a window of a couple turns after I started playing janissary when I could've flipped back around and made something work. But it would've meant working with Italy, and he and I had a very unfortunate negotiation breakdown.

The same turn I convoyed to North Africa, I also ordered my army in Marseilles to Piedmont - so a double go-get-em turn toward Italy. By sheer happenstance, Austria at the same time ordered his army in Tyrolia to Piedmont in a move to surround Venice. So we bounced. Tom must have been so distracted by me bouncing the Austrian that he didn't even pay attention to what the rest of my units were doing that turn. When we negotiated that fall, he approached me with a big smile on his face as he extended his arm to offer a handshake. That... led me to assume he understood what had just happened and wow, he must be cooler with it than I expected! Uh, nope. He just had no clue. And somehow or another in our conversation it just never became explicitly clear that I had a guarantee on one of his dots. It was funny to me in retrospect at the time, but there is a valuable lesson for me to learn there about effective communication. Even though I got Tunis, there would be points later in the game when I wished I had better relations with Italy to leverage.

It made a very awkward order writing phase when the quiet period started with Tom pointing at my unit in North Africa and going "Wait, that's not supposed to be there, right?" He thought it got put there by mistake. But now it was too late to talk about it.

Randy

That's very unfortunate. Seems like something like that occurs at every FtF event, though, just part of the charm of tournaments to me.

I think we're about ready to wrap up! Thanks much for your time and insight - any final thoughts on the tournament you want to leave the readers with?

Steven

I want to emphasize that everyone should make every effort to participate in the face-to-face hobby. The people you meet are what really matters, and the dots will always be there next time. So make the most of the opportunity to connect with others from around the globe in such a unique way. Dixie is truly a tradition unlike any other.

The Beauty of Diplomacy Part 1 – The Concept

By Mal Arky

I was recently watching a YouTube video on the history of Avalon Hill, starting with the first game published, *Tactics*. It looked like an interesting game, if a little ugly. I don't have much to say about the video except that I can see where Allan Calhamer got the idea for his original convoy rules for Diplomacy when it was still called "Realpolitik".

Anyway, I wasn't really paying attention as the video ended and, as YouTube does, it moved me onto another video: *The Dice Tower's* "Best of (Old) Avalon Hill" games. This was one of those top ten videos. In tenth place was Diplomacy.

Tenth. Hmm.

The presenter of the video actually said that he didn't like Diplomacy. I think the word he used was "detest". He had only included it because of how useful he'd found it in the classroom for teaching cooperation and teaching about WWI.

He isn't the first person who I've seen say they don't like Diplomacy. Often, it's because people don't 'get' the game. I actually had someone tell me that nothing happens! If you're used to standard board games, I can see that. For long spells nothing happens on the board, I know, but that's because it's not *supposed* to happen on the board.

This got me wondering how I would 'sell' Diplomacy to a sceptic, or perhaps to someone who had played it and found they didn't like it.

And then I decided it didn't matter. We all have our favourite games, and we all have our favoured way of *playing* those games. Let's face it, there's enough diversity within the Dip community about how it should be played to illustrate that! But none of that matters. What matters is that we're enjoying the experience, that we're having fun. It's a game - that's what it's supposed to be about.

It did get me thinking about why I enjoy this game as much as I do... and I've had a lot of time to think about it while I've been laid up recently. So, I thought that - although I should be preaching to the converted - I'd put that down on paper, so to speak.

As I began writing, I intended to write a single piece on what makes Diplomacy beautiful. As I was writing, however, I realised it was going to be an overly long

piece, so I decided that I'd better serialise it and expand on my ideas.

So, this is the first in a series of articles on *The Beauty of Diplomacy* as I see it, starting with the concept of the game.

Off the Board

It always rankles with me when I see Diplomacy described as a war game. I know it *looks* like a war game: it features armies and fleets vying for control of countries on a map of Europe. It might *seem* like a war game: it is about taking control of Europe. And it is based around WWI, even though it is set *before* WWI.

The first challenge to this misconception is the name of the game itself. If it is a war game, why call it "Diplomacy"?

You can see this when you consider some other games I enjoy. *Kingmaker* is called that because the idea is that you take a royal heir and make them king (or queen) of England (and Wales). *Britannia* is called that because it's about the Stone Age invasions of Britain. *History of the World* is about empires growing and establishing themselves throughout history.

Why is it surprising, then, to find that *Diplomacy* is therefore a game about... diplomacy?

Of course, this isn't true of all games. *Chess* really doesn't have a meaning outside of the game. The same could be said for *Draughts* (or *Checkers*, if you're the other side of the Atlantic). But I would think if you're about to play a game called "Diplomacy" you'd probably *not* think you were going to play a war game.

Those long spells when "nothing happens" are when the game is played. The short spells when pieces move about the board are nothing more than the culmination of the game being played. The board *illustrates* the game play.

Is there any other game that does this? Not that I know of, although I admit to a less than comprehensive knowledge of modern board games. I suppose you might say that games like *chess* are similar in that the board represents the strategy the players are employing. But these games are about what happens on the board; in Diplomacy it's about what happens *off* the board that matters.

If you don't recognise this, then you won't enjoy the game. If you prefer to see action on the board, then you're not going to enjoy Diplomacy. And, of course, if you don't like being betrayed, you're not going to enjoy Diplomacy.

Destroying Friendships

I wonder who came up with that line as a marketing ploy: "Destroying friendships since 1959"? Clever... but I bet it took some persuasion to get the marketing executives to go with it! After all, who wants to play a game that ends friendships? Isn't playing games supposed to be about *celebrating* friendships?

But it's intriguing, isn't it? What is it about this game that would destroy our friendship? Shall we find out? *Dare* we find out?

Oh, *that's* what it means!

A widespread misconception about playing Diplomacy is that it is about lying and betrayal. These have their place in the game, of course; anyone who's actually played it will know that. But, as I've seen it stated time and time again, Diplomacy is more about honesty and trust than anything else.

I guess we've all played a game of Dip with those people who jump at the chance of stabbing other players. See an opportunity, jump on it. Don't mind where this leaves you in the long term, just see that you can do it *now* and so take the chance.

This is a strategy (to give it a degree of dignity it probably doesn't deserve) that can win games, I'll admit. It probably shouldn't but when it breeds distrust among the other players (if *he's* done that and got something from it, why wouldn't *she* do it to me?) it can mean that the whole game breaks down into a festival of caution and fear; a paranoia party.

Those who do well at the game, however, do so by maintaining trust and alliances for as long as possible. I don't mean the Carebears among us. They don't tend to do very well. Sure, they may share a high percentage of draws, but that doesn't lead to wins. The players who do well in the Hobby are those who *do* stab but they do it at the most opportune time.

This, again, relates to the concept behind the game. It was designed to mimic the web of treaties, alliances, arrangements, pacts, etc leading up to WWI. It was called 'Realpolitik' originally because it was meant to be a reflection of Bismarckian diplomacy: Be a friend to everyone, but only if it is advantageous to you. When it

stops being something that favours your own interests, change.

What I really enjoy about Diplomacy is this aspect of the game. Why would an opponent help me to win, when by doing so they lessen their own chances of winning? I'm no great puppet master, I'm not fantastic at manipulating my opponents. I prefer to show them how *they* get something positive by helping *me* get something positive.

Of course, you're never quite sure that your 'ally' will do what you hope they'll do. And that is another aspect I enjoy: the anticipation of waiting to see if the real play, the things that happen off the board, are represented by what happens on the board. The reveal. It's the same thing with *Poker*: when the cards are revealed, you can see if the real play was worth it. With Diplomacy it's whether that fleet in the Aegean is going to support you to Greece or slip behind your lines into the Ionian.

I've never seen Diplomacy end a friendship, although I have seen it cause resentment and even dislike between players. I've seen players yelling in another player's face following the reveal. I've seen players tantruming in public press about another player who has betrayed them. It isn't always about not understanding what the game's about, but when it is, you just have to shake your head, chuckle to yourself, and find a way to use that immaturity to your advantage.

Pure Strategy

There's no *chance* in Diplomacy. There are no dice, no event cards, no spinning wheels of fortune. It's pure strategy.

There is *luck*, of course. You may be lucky enough to draw a power you are better at playing and not one you struggle to play well. You may be lucky enough to find your neighbour is a rookie who hasn't played this form of Diplomacy before, or a complete novice to the game. You may even be lucky enough that your neighbour drops from the game for some reason, giving you the chance to simply walk into their SCs.

Luck, though, isn't the same as chance.

I have nothing against games that feature chance. I mentioned above that I enjoy *Kingmaker*. If you've never played the game, it involves event cards, and a card drawn might provide you with an advantage, or it might prove disastrous. In these games, you grin and or groan and move on with the game. It's how the game is played.

In Diplomacy, however, what happens in the game reflects your ability to play the game. You left yourself open to an attack by an ally, and then were attacked? Well, silly you. On the other hand, if you leave yourself similarly open and you have built a solid relationship with the other player so that they *don't* take advantage of the situation, that's skill.

There are times when even the best players fall foul of events that they have no control over. Sometimes an opponent just isn't open to persuasion. Sometimes, they're just a greedy bugger or an opportunist. Occasionally you come across a vindictive player who attacks you no matter what it means to them, or a player who is just too cautious to get any kind of effective cooperation going.

In these situations, it isn't always about how good a player *you* are, how skilled you are at the game, but about how poor a player *they* prove to be. Not a lot you can do about that, is there?

Well, actually, there probably *is* something you *could* do: learn to deal with these players. Alongside understanding strategy should be flexibility and an ability to adapt to the situation you find yourself in.

You can't blame a poor outcome on chance; if you lose, it's because you couldn't deal effectively with the way the game developed. You don't need to beat yourself up about it, but you should look to learn from it and see how you could improve when faced with a similar situation in the future.

Diplomacy isn't a game for lazy players.

Equality

In a world lacking in equality, where superiority is celebrated and viciously maintained, the equality in Diplomacy is refreshing.

I'm not talking about the balance between powers on the board, which is a subtle imbalance. I'll come to that in another article. I'm talking about the equality between units.

Diplomacy is often compared to *chess*, with some degree of accuracy. After all, Calhmer utilised some aspects of *chess* in the game. However, I find that most comparisons are weak, at best.

One aspect of *chess* that doesn't translate to Diplomacy is that *Chess* pieces have different strengths. This is common in a lot of war games: a mounted unit might be better than a foot unit when moving and possibly when

attacking, but might be weaker when attacking a unit of spears, for instance.

In Diplomacy, each piece has exactly the same strength, whether attacking or defending. This is unique, in my experience, and is there because it *isn't* a war game. Again, the pieces reflect the play, they don't lead the play. If a fleet attacks an army, they are equal in strength. The only difference is where they can go on the board.

This simplicity is, itself, beautiful. You don't have to worry about building a unit of marines, or a battleship rather than a cruiser. You simply need more attacking strength, more units involved in the attack, than your opponent can muster as defensive strength.

This simplicity is lost in variants that have rules about half-strength attacks. If this unit attacks from here to there, it attacks with half-strength. Why would this rule be included? Either to better reflect the 'reality' of such an attack or to improve the game play.

I'll come back to 'reality' in Dip and Dip variants in a later article, but here I simply want to celebrate the simplicity of every unit having a strength of one. It means that, when you're working out how to dislodge that fleet in St Petersburg, all you have to worry about is getting the right units into the right spaces to overcome the potential defensive strength. That, in turn, means you can concentrate on the real play, the negotiations, behind getting the support you need.

And here the beauty is enhanced: very often you won't be able to utilise your own forces independently of other players' units; you'll need to persuade one or more players to help you. This is the true complexity behind successful on-the-board strategy: getting support.

The beautiful simplicity of what happens on the board is matched by the beautiful complexity of *making* it happen on the board... and the beautiful and painful anticipation of waiting to see if what you want to happen, happens.

The Concept

For me, the beauty of the concepts behind Diplomacy is that they reflect that it isn't a war game. It isn't a WWI simulation, and it isn't about the pieces on the board. It's about diplomacy off the board and about using that time, where "nothing happens", to play the game.

I've seen some of that beauty lost. I've seen players organise games where they try to simulate WWI. You're playing England? Then you must be allied with France and Russia, and you must attack Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. I know this is the same thing as the classic 2-player game, with Italy being randomly

assigned to one side or the other, but there's no diplomacy in the 2-player game. If you're trying to do this with multiple players, where's the diplomacy? It becomes solely about the strategy or moving units around. Boring and pointless.

I've also seen attempts to play games and contractualize agreements between players. If you agree to an alliance with me, then there are certain things that you simply can - or can't - do. If there was ever a way to make Diplomacy unplayable, this is it.

As I've said above, not understanding the game isn't always the reason people don't like Diplomacy. It's a long game. It's a serious game. It isn't the same as

playing a game where chance is involved. And you can be eliminated from the game and have to twiddle your thumbs, or whichever body parts you prefer to twiddle, while others play. It, very simply, might not be the game for you.

For me, the concepts behind the game make it a beautiful thing. There's no other game where you put so much effort into communicating with other players, hoping that you've persuaded them to one course of action or another, and then have to deal with the powerlessness of seeing these opponents' decisions played out on the board.

If that isn't a thrill for you, you're definitely in the wrong game.

Great Game Diplomacy: An Alternative in Asia

By Paul Webb

In 2004, I created Canton Diplomacy, a variant set in Asia around the year 1900. The variant actually found its way to the DPjudge and vDiplomacy and the game can still be played on these platforms. However, the Canton variant is an incomplete or unfinished work. The variant was not sufficiently play-tested (any new game requires at least a hundred test games) and the automated tools weren't available back then to assist in the development of Diplomacy variants. Those are my excuses!

In 2022, I reconsidered the Canton map. I wanted this modification to meet three criteria: (1) it should be more balanced than Standard Diplomacy, (2) there should be a variety of playable opening moves for each power, and (3) the map should be mostly historically and geographically accurate. I say "mostly accurate" because I think small concessions in these matters can be made to enhance gameplay. After all, the borders of Bulgaria in Standard are not exactly as they were in 1900.

An 1892 map of Asia, originally published by Encyclopedia Britannica and found online in the University of Texas map archives, served as the blueprint for the original Canton design and this revision. Canton was the working title for this variant until I could think of something better. I did not come up with anything else, so Canton stuck. However, this new revision will be the Great Game variation. Great Game was originally a term used to describe the rivalry between Britain and Russia for influence and control of Central Asia in the nineteenth century. The expression was further popularized by Rudyard Kipling in his 1904

novel, *Kim*, which uses "Great Game" to portray the power struggles between great nations as a game of sorts.

Next, I put the Albert bots back to work. I ended up testing 239 different variations of Great Game and the bots played at least 10 games of each variation. I estimate that the bots played over 4,000 total games for this project. Each deviation consistently encountered one of the following issues: there wasn't a good mixture of opening moves for one or more powers, Japan was too strong, Turkey was too strong, or China was too weak. You may be thinking: "239 different variations? That's insane." It is insane, but it was a labor of love. It's fun to take a historical setting and attempt to convert it to a playable game. I learned a lot about variant design and I better understand why Calhmer did what he did in his original creation.

What surprised me most during the process was seeing how a small change on the map transforms power balance across the board. This border change makes Power A stronger, which makes Power B weaker, which makes Power C stronger, and so forth. Play-testing and trial and error are the keys, like Edison trying to figure out a light bulb. I learned that some of my ideas weren't so great and some important discoveries were made by accident or mistake. Of the 239 variations I attempted, I think only two versions are releasable to the public (v226 and v235). One has more opening move variance, but less power balance and the other has less opening variance, but is more balanced. I chose the latter, more balanced variation, as the final edition:



Diplomacy
Great Game Variant
 By Paul Webb

- Britain
- China
- France
- Holland
- Japan
- Russia
- Turkey
- Army
- ⊕ Fleet
- ⊙ Neutral

Game Notes:
 - Standard Diplomacy rules apply.
 - Game starts in Spring 1891.
 - 19 centers required for victory.

Map Notes: - Caspian Sea and Nepal are impassible.
 - Canton, Constantinople, Egypt, and Vladivostok are canals with one coast.
 - Damascus and Siam have multiple coasts. Turkey's fleet starts in Dam/nc.
 - Units can move between Medan and Batavia and Vladivostok and Sakhalin.

- An army can occupy Formosa and Philippines.
 - An army cannot occupy Riau Islands.
 Bel=Beluchistan, Cam=Cambodia, Chg=Chugoku, GOS=Gulf of Siam, GOT=Gulf of Tonkin, Han=Hanoi, Sar=Sarawak

One guy on the internet described the Canton variant as a "simplified version of Colonial diplomacy." I have not played Colonial, so I'm not too familiar with the variant, but this seems like a fair assessment. Colonial, set in Asia during the 1800s, contains a total of 118 provinces with 58 supply centers, whereas Canton and Great Game are similar to Standard's scope and size. The Great Game variant has 80 spaces and 36 supply centers, slightly larger than Standard. I did not consult the Colonial map when designing the Canton or Great Game variants. My intent was to create a historical Asian diplomacy alternative from scratch.

In Great Game, China has five home centers, Russia has four, and the other five powers have three centers.

My preference was for China to have four home centers, but I couldn't make it work. I attempted over 100 different variations of a four-unit China, but China was always too weak. I need to mention one other design note: province abbreviations. I avoided abbreviations like "AND" for Andaman Sea and "For" for Formosa. These abbreviations confuse some computer languages and they can be interpreted as meaning something else.

I tested the final version of Great Game with Jason van Hal's Albert (v6.0.1) on David Norman's Server (v0.38) and Mapper (v0.41). Albert played 500 no-press games, as all seven powers, and posted the following results:

	Solo	2-Way	3-Way	4-Way	5-Way	6-Way
Britain	52	0	20	16	5	1
China	31	0	16	25	11	1
France	46	1	27	20	9	1
Holland	42	1	51	37	11	1
Japan	83	2	40	24	9	1
Russia	51	2	24	12	4	1
Turkey	65	2	47	22	6	0

To convert the above information into points, I'll award 60 points for a solo victory, 30 points for a 2-way draw, 20 points for a 3-way draw, 15 points for a 4-way draw, 12 points for 5-way draw, and 10 points for 6-way draw.

Here are the total points, along with the average number of points per game, for each power in Great Game, in comparison to the totals for each power in Standard, in which Albert also played 500 no-press games:

Great Game	Points	Average	Standard	Points	Average
Japan	6318	12.64	Turkey	7977	15.95
Turkey	5302	10.60	France	7533	15.02
Holland	4267	8.53	England	4312	8.62
Russia	3838	7.68	Austria	3875	7.75
Britain	3830	7.66	Germany	2717	5.43
France	3748	7.50	Russia	2266	4.53
China	2697	5.39	Italy	1320	2.64

The Great Game results are about what you would expect after studying the map for a few minutes. Three edge powers have the best results and three central powers perform worst, with Russia somewhere in the middle. According to the bot simulation, Great Game meets the criteria as more balanced than Standard. In Great Game, the strongest power scores 2.3 times the worst power, the second strongest power scores 1.4 times the sixth power, and the third power scores 1.1 times the fifth power. In Standard, these figures are 6.0, 3.3, and 1.6 respectively. China is the weakest power in Great Game, but gained over twice as many points as Italy in Standard. Also, Great Game is more balanced than the New Standard variant, which I covered in Diplomacy World #157.

Great Game does have stalemate lines. The most prominent ones are north and south of Nepal, which is impassible. South of Nepal, an eastern or western power

can use five units in several locations to block advancement across India and the Indian Ocean. Likewise, an eastern or western power can use five armies in multiple provinces north of Nepal to stall opposition. There is one critical nine-unit stalemate line along EIO-BAY-Ben-Bih-Chu-Tib-Sin-Mng-Irk that an eastern power (or powers) can use to cut off a western power from two-thirds of the board. But overall, Great Game is less drawish than Standard. In 500 games for each, Albert played to 168 draws in Standard (33.6 percent of games) and 130 draws in Great Game (26 percent).

In Great Game, some important land spaces are Chungking, Bengal, Manchuria, and Laos. Chungking, China's central city, is the hub of the board, like Munich in Standard. One sound Great Game strategy may be to send all your units to Chungking, at least they're moving in the right direction. Bengal is the gateway to British

India. China can enter India through its back door, via Tibet and Punjab, but this method is more cumbersome. Manchuria is a critical province on the Russian-Chinese border that is adjacent to four supply centers. Control of Manchuria usually signifies who is dominant in the Northeast Asia triad. And Laos is the entry point into Southeast Asia and an ideal province for an invading army to start mischief in French Indochina. A common endgame theme in Great Game is the final battle between western armies and eastern fleets along Vietnamese and Chinese coastal cities.

Significant sea spaces include South China Sea, East Indian Ocean, and Banda Sea. South China Sea borders 11 other provinces, more than any other, to include five supply centers. China's surveillance and occupation of this "Chinese lake" has always been essential to the nation's security, in this game and in reality. East Indian Ocean is a crucial bulwark for Dutch defense. If an eastern power can hold EIO, this is an important first step in establishing a draw between existing powers.

Banda Sea doesn't seem too critical upon first glance, but if a western power can turn the corner at Timor Sea and get behind enemy lines in Banda Sea, this power greatly improves its victory odds. Think of a Turkish fleet in Banda Sea as the equivalent of a Turkish fleet slipping into Mid-Atlantic Ocean in Standard.

And finally, one of the last decisions made for this variant was the resolution of a start date. For counting purposes, 1901 is an ideal year for onset, but ultimately, I had to acknowledge 1891 as more historically accurate for this scenario. In retrospect, the Sino-Japanese war had concluded in 1895 and Russia had occupied China's Port Arthur by 1898. While on the subject of game years, the median end date of Albert's Great Game games was 1921, while for Standard it was 1925. This means Great Game ran about six game years longer than Standard. There's more Great Game to cover, to include strategies, tactics, and unique challenges for each individual power, as well as opening move analysis. Perhaps we'll explore these areas in future publications.

Selected Upcoming Events

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

Cascadia Open – July 9th – July 10th, 2022 - Holiday Inn Express, 15808 104th Ave, Surrey, BC, Canada – Email: Cascadia.open@gmail.com

Virtual Diplomacy League Event – July 16th, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

Virtual World Diplomacy Community Summer Classic – July 22nd – July 24th, 2022 (and a Top Board on July 31st, 2022) - <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf15qUTw3Npn8r3xOImPz8xHuFBWLmdXoou-3DtfIPpkcyAA/viewform>

Boston Massacre – August 12th – August 14th, 2022 - Pandemonium Books and Games, 4 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts - <https://sites.google.com/site/bostonmassacrediplomacy/>

Virtual Diplomacy League Event – August 27th, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

Euro DipCon 2022 / Swiss Diplomacy Championship – September 9th – September 11th, 2022 - HENIGMA local, rue de la drague 43, Sion, Switzerland – suissediplomacychampionship@gmail.com

Spirecon – September 24th – September 25th, 2022 - Chesterfield, Derbyshire. UK - <http://spirecon.uk>

Weasel Moot – September 24th – September 25th, 2022 – Hyatt Place Downtown/The Loop, Chicago, IL – <https://windycityweasels.org/weasel-moot-xvi/>

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

An Interview with Cameron Higbe

by Randy Lawrence-Hurt

Randy

So diving right into it: Dixie was your first FtF tournament, right? What drew you to it?

Cameron

Yes, it was! In fact, it was my first time ever playing Diplomacy on a physical board instead of a screen, which was certainly a learning curve. I came to Dixiecon because David Hood had been so welcoming to me when I first reached out to him in late 2020. I was excited to compete in real time with other people who care so much about the game and experience the unique style of face-to-face play!

Randy

Have to ask this of every online player who comes to a FtF event - were there any distinct differences between online and FtF play that surprised you?

Cameron

The elements of reading body language and watching who is talking to who certainly add to the dynamics. Also, hand writing orders allows for more errors and interesting moves. There's a sense of urgent chaos that is distinct to in-person play.

Randy

"Urgent chaos," I like that.

Obviously you adjusted well to the differences, seeing as you won the Player's Choice award. Did you have any idea that would be headed your way?

Cameron

Why, thank you! No, I really didn't have a clue; I had actually nominated someone else for that award. So, it was a surprise and a nice take-away from my first face-to-face tournament.

Randy

And based on my experience on our one board together, it was well deserved!

So moving to the tournament itself. You had a pretty exceptional experience on your round one board, want to talk us through what happened?

Cameron

So, my first game started around 6:30 p.m. and mainly consisted of new face-to-face players, which was a nice way to ease into the tournament. However, what I don't think anyone could have predicted was that the game would continue until 5:00 a.m. -- almost eleven hours

later! We attempted a draw at one point, but it was voted down, and from then on all draw attempts were publicly vetoed until we dwindled the ranks down to three people. As a 6-centre England, I was able to play both of the remaining larger powers against each other long enough to force a 3-way draw. It was an exhausting introduction, but it makes for a great story now!

Randy

I got to "enjoy" some of that experience too, as we were roommates and I recall you coming in at almost 6am. Gotta say, that's one of the more brutal tournament stories I've heard. You must've been pretty motivated to get a good result!

Cameron

Haha, I tried to be as quiet as I could coming back to the room, but I still managed to make my entrance known.

I was motivated because I really saw a path to that three-way draw and I wanted a decent opening score. I just couldn't get other people to vote for it, so I had to wait until they were eliminated. Honestly, those who played until almost the end and then didn't make it to the draw amazed me. I'm not sure I could have been that patient only to be removed right at the end.

Randy

I'm sure I couldn't, and I suspect that's why the ability to vote oneself out of a draw is a mechanism of the Dixie system. I'm more amazed they stuck it out despite seeing the inevitable coming - maybe a little bit of spite involved? Did you talk it out with the other players on the board later in the tournament?

Cameron

There were definitely some heated disputes going on throughout, so that very well could have been a factor into why a draw was impossible for so long. Personality-wise, I honestly got along with everyone on the board, so I got some candid explanations for why actions were taken and what motivations were involved. I'm glad I had the chance to be on a board with other first-timers to help us get to know each other and build those connections.

Randy

So take us to your second board. How did that go for you, any specific takeaways? Did your late night/early morning play a significant role?

Cameron

My second board was stacked with longtime players including Ed, Brandon, and you; so, much more intimidating! Honestly, I think I fared well, but my ~1 hour of sleep absolutely played a role. Upon Brandon and Ed's unified demand for a two-way draw, I decided to vote myself out, fearing a slow grinding of my position. Despite sitting on seven centres as Italy, I didn't think I had the prowess to fend off that ER alliance on two fronts, and my motivation to try to hold out for another three-way draw was just not there. Looking back, I probably would have tried to play those two off each other more and fought for inclusion in the draw if I'd had more energy -- which really speaks to the physical element of in-person Diplomacy. I don't think I truly realized how taxing in-person Diplomacy can be: trying to maintain your tactical facilities, while also remaining socially aware, while also scrambling to talk to various people and keep your ultimate plans secret, while also (in my case) running on essentially no sleep...it's truly exhausting after hours of non-stop play! But it's also very rewarding when, like in my first game, you get a positive result.

And in the end, I'm still proud of my play as Italy; it's the largest I've ever grown with that power before in a tournament setting.

Randy

I agree, I thought you played Italy well, and I'll admit I was a little disappointed you agreed to vote yourself out of the draw - both because I thought you could have forced your way into a three-way, and (selfishly) because it might have allowed me to make it a four-way! But I don't blame you at all, like you said, FtF Diplomacy is physically and emotionally taxing.

So now we're on to round three. What happened on that board?

Cameron

On my final board I played France and got lucky to be paired up with a very pro-French England. Germany made an order error in 1901 and sealed his fate with a fleet build instead of an army, leaving himself very open to the EF advance. Meanwhile, Italy was busy fighting in the East, so for a while England and I had strong pacing across the West.

After a while, I got entangled with Italy and things got rocky in the East. But, ultimately we stopped anyone from running away with the game. I pushed for a three-way with England, Turkey, and myself, using the knowledge that it was a time-limited game to my advantage, but ultimately we were forced into a 6-way draw as the timer reached zero.

Randy

I remember watching the lead-up to that draw vote. I was happy to see it end in a six-way, as a three-way would've cost me my Best Turkey. Gotta imagine it was frustrating for the players on the board, though?

Cameron

It was frustrating because I had worn down Turkey into accepting the 3-way draw (he certainly didn't want to share a draw with 3 more people) and even Italy was open to voting themselves out of the draw. Austria was the only one vocally opposed. If Turkey hadn't "accidentally"* left Austria with an open centre, we could likely have gotten the 3-way draw. But when time ran out, it was clear that we'd never get a unanimous consensus among those other 3 to vote themselves out (Austria, Germany, and Italy). Which, to be fair, I also would not have voted myself out in their position. Like I mentioned, I was the main force pushing against a two-way for a few years, because it excluded me.

*Who knows if it was really an accident, right?

Randy

Yeah, definitely no incentive for the survivors to make all their effort meaningless.

Was this your first experience with a draw-based scoring system?

Cameron

Actually, my sole tournament experience so far has been through Dixiecon (virtual in 2021 and now face-to-face), so I've only ever competed within a draw-based system. My goal is to learn more about the other scoring methods and how they affect people's play style.

Randy

Gotcha. Yeah, in my experience, scoring system can make a significant difference in how a game unfolds. No need to revive that debate here, though (but draw-based is bad).

So overall how do you feel about the tournament, and your performance in it? Anything you wish/think you could have done differently or better?

Cameron

Haha, yes, I'm becoming more aware just how much debate there is around draw-based scoring.

The tournament was a wonderful experience! It was so nice to be immersed in a group of people who love Diplomacy. It seems even when players are locked in heated contention, their love for the game transcends their on (and off)-board disagreements.

Coming in 12th, I was just short of reaching the Top Ten, so that's a tangible objective for next time. But overall, I'm satisfied with the way I played and I look forward to staying connected with people I've met through this competition. Plus, being selected for the "Players' Choice Award" feels like a high note on which to end until my next tournament appearance!

Randy

Terrific, glad you enjoyed the experience! I think that's all the questions I have, so thanks again for your time, and hope to see you at another tournament soon!

Cameron

Absolutely! Thanks for the interview. Hopefully I'll see you around sooner rather than later!

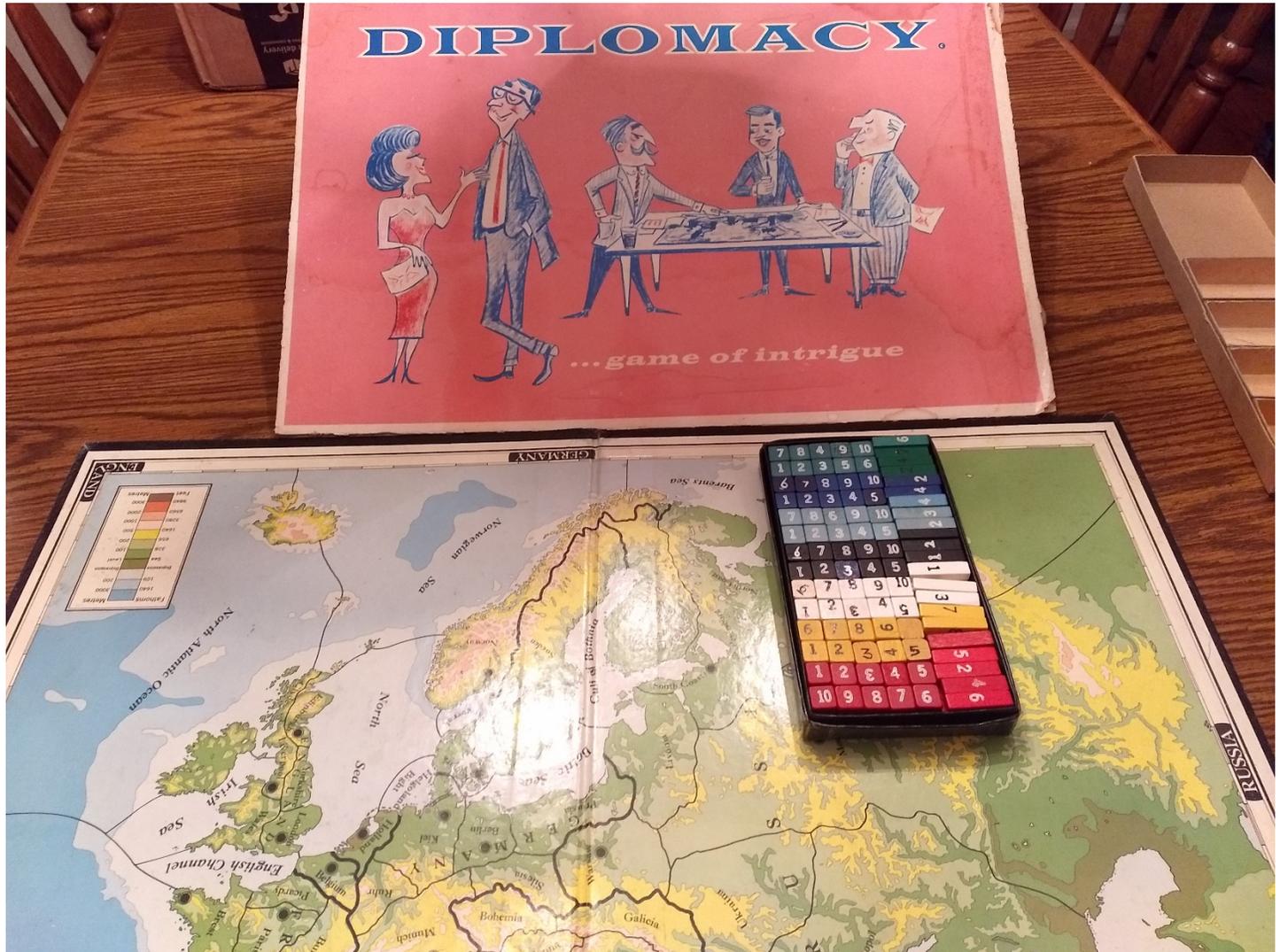


Ask the Hobby Historian: A Key Find

By David Hood

At the 2022 Dipcon in San Jose, Edi Birsan was showing off one of the original sets of Diplomacy produced by Allan Calhamer himself back in 1959. This was before Calhamer had a formal publisher for the game. I was marveling at the history of it all when Edi informed me that he was looking for a good home for some of his Diplomacy stuff. He asked me for my home address.

A few weeks later I received a large box at my doorstep. Honestly, I had sort of forgotten what Edi told me he was sending. After I opened it, I remembered. I now have my own original Calhamer set, with other Key elements in it I was not expecting.



This was the set that Calhamer himself sent to Texan Jeff Key in 1971 as a gift. The letter to Jeff is still in the box, along with some other correspondence between them. I met Calhamer back in the day, but never Jeff Key. I know that he was a Key piece of hobby history, from the Key Opening if nothing else (the one where Austria goes to Trieste and then to Serbia in Fall 1901 with Austrian blessing.) I also knew that Jeff had published, had invented variants, and had hosted

tournaments, but this seemed like a good time to research exactly what all Jeff Key had been up to Dip-wise, and what threads he had woven into the tapestry of Dipdom.

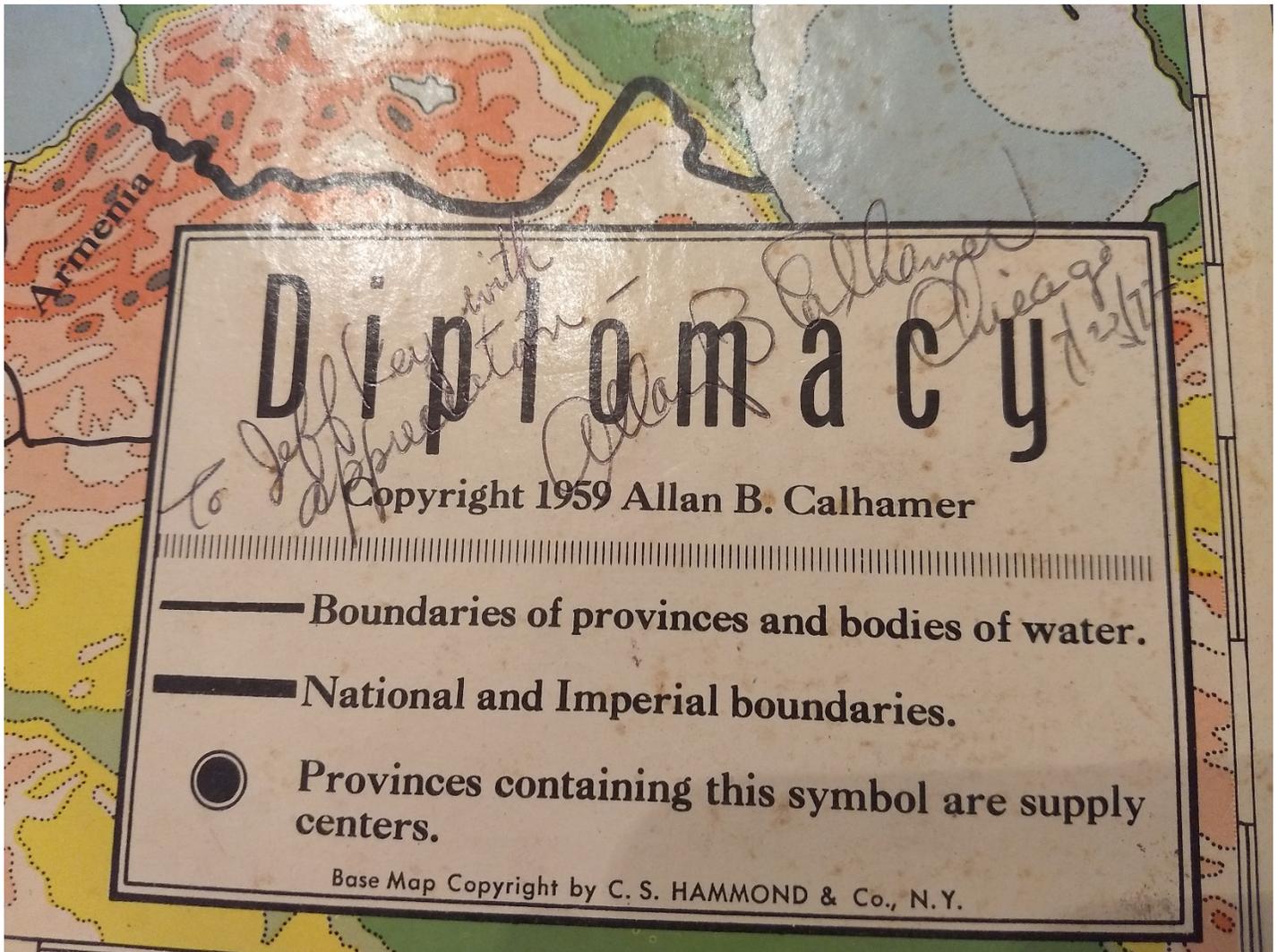
Let's start with Dipcon itself, the North America Diplomacy Championships. That's where this story began, with Edi and me at the San Jose Dipcon. Jeff Key actually hosted about 100 players for Dipcon III in

the year 1970, at a college campus in Oklahoma City. Back before that, Dipcon was basically a glorified housecon, a bit like the role Huskycon played decades later. The social aspect of the game was still paramount over the formal tournament type events which later became the norm in the Diplomacy hobby. Jeff's Dipcon was a Key transition point as it more resembled a formal tournament, just without a scoring system per se as the players basically voted on whom they thought played the best over the weekend. Jeff was a well-known and respected member of the early Dip hobby (back when SF/fantasy folk constituted the bulk of the active members) which helped in the promotion of this Dipcon as well as its influence over subsequent conventions.

To follow up on that last point, another way in which Jeff was an early influencer of the hobby was in the world of variants. Because of how enamored early Dippers were with fantasy themes, many variants of that day used Tolkien's Middle Earth as a setting. Jeff was involved in

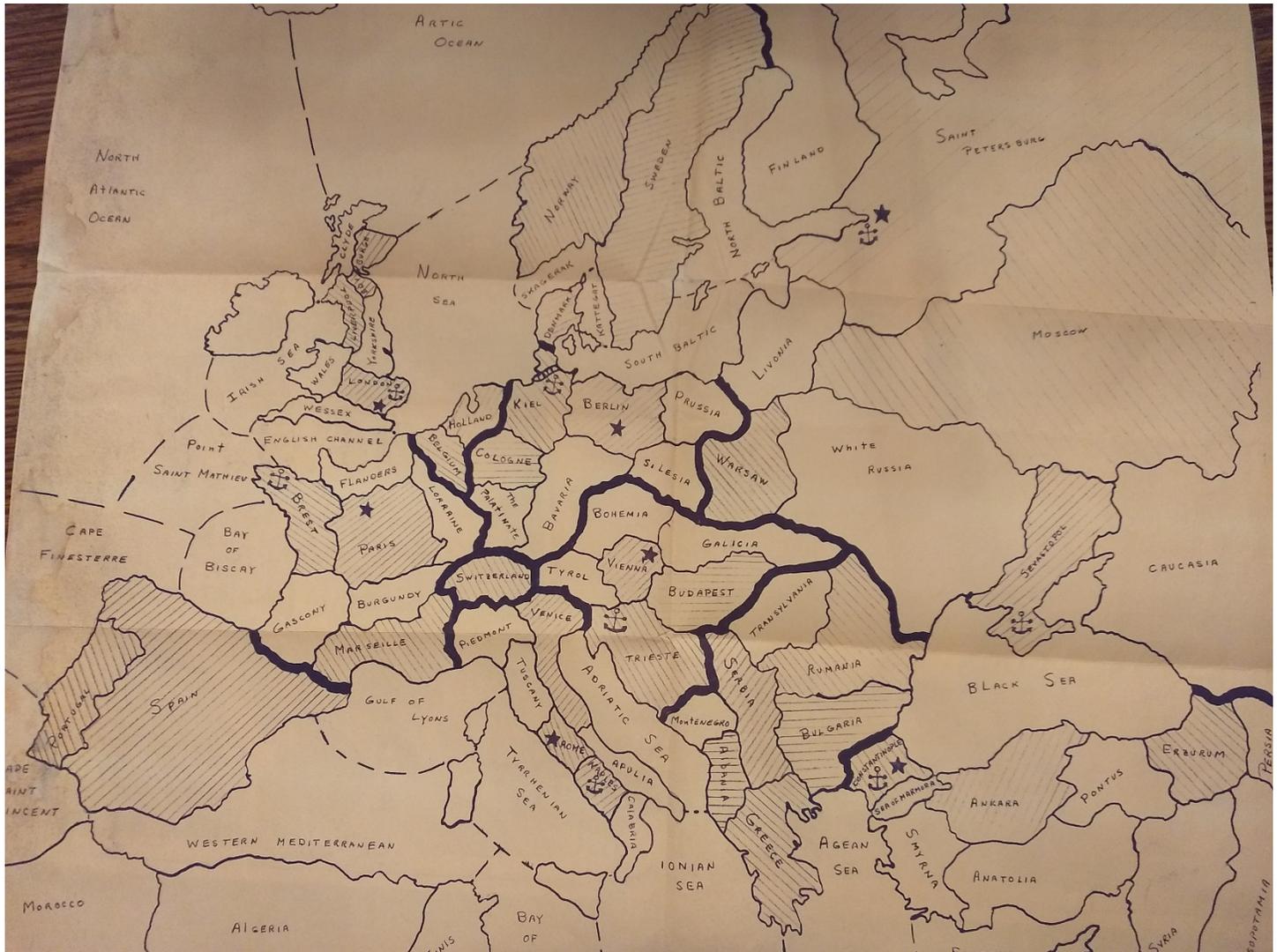
several of these designs, including the War of the Ring developed in 1976. There is a page about this variant at Boardgamegeek for any interested. Another rule change often used in early variants, in order to break down stalemate lines on a new map, was that a unit ordered to move (but which failed in that move and thus stayed put) could be dislodged by an attack from just one unit by itself. Guess what this rule was called? You guessed it, the Key Rule.

Now, was Jeff Key just some dreamer who sat around innovating the hobby, or did the fella know how to play the bloody game as well? You be the judge. In 1984, Dipcon traveled to Jeff's Texan Turf. At the Dallas event, he bested the field to take the championship at that 17th North American Championships, along with Best Austria and Best Russia. Unfortunately for me, this was two years before I started going to Dipcons myself so I never had the chance to meet or play with Jeff, as far as I recall. A Key miss on my part.



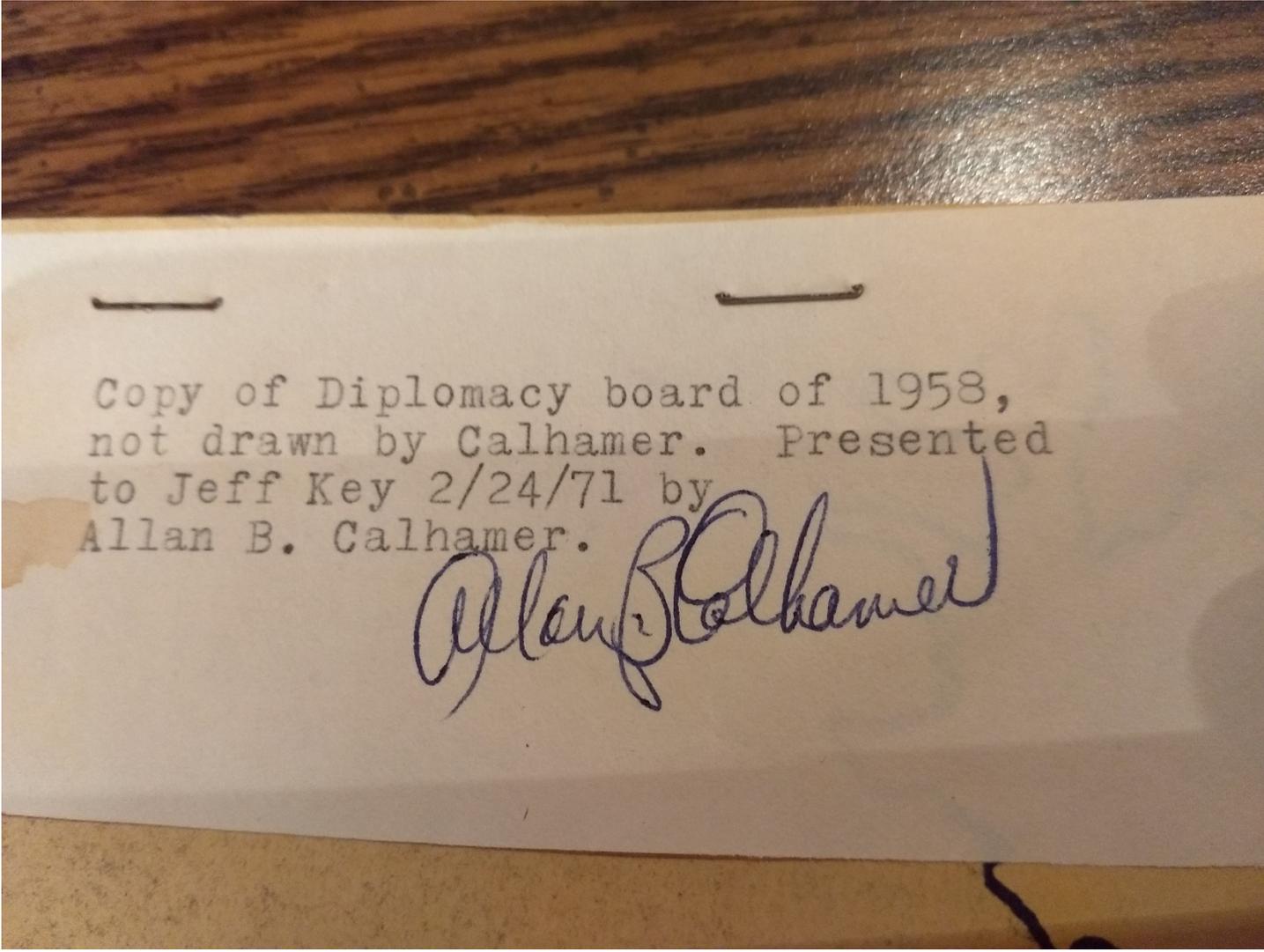
Let's talk just a little about the actual Diplomacy set which inspired this article. As you can see from the accompanying photos, it had the awesome cover art which we now see in some Diplomacy content nowadays (I sometimes use it myself as the backdrop when I am on screen for DBN commentary of league or tournament games.) The wooden pieces were numbered, I guess to make it easier later to track exactly where each fleet or army ended up on the board by the end of the game. There were original conference maps in this thing, along with a very awesome signature by Calhamer above the copyright notice in Southern Armenia.

As a bonus, Calhamer had sent to Key (and thus indirectly to me) one of the hand-drawn versions of the original Diplomacy map. The one BEFORE the final version he published after playtesting. See his note regarding this 1958 map, and a photo of the map itself. Notice that Switzerland is a supply center, there are specific anchor symbols where fleets can be built, etc. Back in the 80s I remember seeing some folk playing this original version by mail as a variant game - as I remember, the feedback was that it was kinda good that he changed to the Diplomacy map and rules we all now know and love.



The point of this article is not to glorify the past, of course. There were aspects of the hobby back in the day which we probably would not recognize now, and even would not want to recognize. Instead, I think it important to remember that everything we enjoy in our hobby activities these days rests on the shoulders, on the work, of past hobbyists like Jeff Key. Which also

means that what we do now will become the basis for some neato cool project done by some young whippersnappers in the future. It's Key that we remember that - it should inspire us to excellence, so that those future Hobby projects will be even more excellent.



Copy of Diplomacy board of 1958,
not drawn by Calhamer. Presented
to Jeff Key 2/24/71 by
Allan B. Calhamer.

The Windy City Weasels

As told by M.F. Morrison

The Windy City Weasels, source of the following apocryphal quotes:

It's a great way to get out of jury duty! -- M.F. Morrison, former weasel

Uh, that guy, oh yeah, that guy, I think he may have thrown a solo? Or something? I mean, I think I heard of that guy. -- A. Berey, former weasel

Look, we had a lot of complaints about that guy, but you know, what are you gonna do? Kick a weasel in the nuts and tie him up in a sack and drop him in the river? No, man, this is Chicago! We use the lake! -- J. OKelly, former weasel

You know what that guy did! He tried to run 'em all out of the club! He tried to run me out of the club! Well, who's left standing? -- C. Kline, weasel

A Journey to Dixiecon

By Bob Durf

Tolkien wrote a lot of very clever things, but perhaps one of the most recognizable to me is an exchange towards the end of Return of the King. The hobbits are making their slow journey back to the Shire, and the following conversation occurs:

"It seems almost like a dream that has slowly faded."

"Not to me," said Frodo. "To me it feels more like falling asleep again."

Of course, the exchange has so many layers to it. For the hobbits, it's two sides of the same coin--is returning from a tumultuous event like waking up to 'reality'? Or did all the fantastical events during their quest make home seem like a sleeping dream of nothingness? Of course, for Frodo, the statement reflects his shell-shock. For him, the trauma of the quest has rendered his homeland into nothing more than a dreary dreamworld--the horrors of his journey are the real waking moments of his life he will be cursed with. What a brilliant statement on how different people deal with traumatic events? For some of us (perhaps the lucky ones), traumatic events (such as the Great War, which Tolkien certainly was recalling when he wrote this scene) are able to tumble gently into the archives of our minds, resting back quiet and hazy, like a nightmare that never really happened. But for Frodo, for many veterans, for many victims of trauma and abuse, normal life is nothing more than a dream state ruined by the reality of horrible experiences.

Now, I am lucky in that the scene calls out to me but in a much simpler and less painful way (it is a blessing to be more like Pippin and Merry and less like Frodo and Sam). I live far from my childhood home; and every time I return home it feels in a way like I never left. My childhood house is still occupied by my parents, our childhood rooms are still bedrooms to lay down our head in, the friends and family up there are still for the most part right around the corner. A week at home is sufficient to bring me right back, make it feel more real, more *permanent*, more awake than a life a thousand miles away. But then I'm back home with my wife and family, sitting down in an office with a mound of work to do...and I'm waking up from a dream. *This* home, *this* church, *this* group of friends and co-workers are what I wake up to.

The days of weekly board game nights are over. The nights of logging onto a computer and seeing a dozen friends online ready to chat and hang-out are in the rear-view mirror. Not to say I don't do any hobby activities I

once did--I still rouse together face-to-face Diplomacy games, I still organize activities online, but we all know the difference. Dixiecon was thus a rare chance for me--a weekend to relax and play some Diplomacy and hang out with some friendly ladies and gentlemen in Chapel Hill and reconnect with several friends up in the area as well.



I suppose I should talk about my on the board play during Dixiecon, but truth be told, I played rather lousy. I work in the legal field, in a position that puts me in the courtroom weekly, negotiating with other attorneys or trying motions and trials against them. This year, catching up from Covid-19, has been even busier than usual. There is a lot of overlap between skills in the legal field and skills on the Diplomacy board--probably why I can still consistently pull together Diplomacy games from otherwise non-gamer lawyers. But I think that led to some fatigue on my part on the boards I played in Dixiecon. I felt toothless, I knew I was not playing as sharp or as clever as I needed to. New players in tournaments can succeed by doing one of the following:

- 1) Play very well and elbow their way to the top, forcing their way into the upper echelons of the 'inner clique' by force of personality
- 2) or they can cotton onto an alliance-based player and stooge their way into a decent tournament score.

Unfortunately, I was not picked as a stooge (and there were at least two at the tournament who seemed to play well with that kind of style--I'm jealous!) and I was certainly not clever enough to break through to any meaningful results. I, free for the first time in over a year to enjoy a weekend of gaming and catching up with other friends, just did not have it in me to play in a way that would make me feel like I was back at work.

I'd like to, like every bad player, blame some of my poor results on patterns outside my control. Turkey seemed to fare awfully in the tournament, and my first game was no exception--I got sandwiched by RAI, and how did the game end? RAI draw. The impetus to take out Turkey in a tournament game seems quite reasonable with the new level of cooperation most Austrians and Italians share and most players shooting for some sort of managed draw to place well in the tournament. I won't sugarcoat my experience with my first game--walking into one's first face-to-face tournament to then be piled on by three players with no meaningful negotiation opportunities was a lousy introduction to the whole business.

My second game saw me play just as poorly, surviving with just two supply centers as France, though I really enjoyed it. That game was a great example of why Diplomacy is just plain fun, even if you aren't winning, or in a position to win *as long as other players are wheeling and dealing*. I probably am in the distinct minority, but I prefer Dixiecon draw-based scoring to other tournament scoring systems. When a large amount of points are relegated to the amount of players in a draw, while still providing some points for survivors, and the key tying both aspects together: *allowing players to vote*

themselves out of the draw, creates a dynamic much closer to the old house-game feel than a sum-of-squares or other style system. If I'm playing or running a zine game or online game, I'm right there with the hardcore scoring systems and solo-mentality sides. If I'm playing face-to-face, and if I am cognizant that the hobby is reliant on fresh blood and *bad players* (I'll include myself in that second category) to make up the numbers and hopefully increase numbers in face-to-face tournaments, I want to replicate the feeling of a house game. I don't mind losing, someone has to, especially in Diplomacy, but there's a world of difference in losing and losing in Diplomacy, so to say, and the difference is whether losing players will come back or stay away, *and* whether they will try to bring other new players with them the next year.

So yes, I lost. But what a nice community to hang out with for a couple days. There were long time veterans who were friendly, a surprising amount of fellow new tournament goers that were all wonderful to meet, and an ambiance (if I may be so biased) of southern hospitality that made the tournament feel just like a big get-together at a friend's house. I'm happy to recommend to the DW readership paying a visit to Chapel Hill next year, and I've already recommended it to some other friends of mine curious about attending in the future. I'm sure Randy has written his own piece encouraging attendance, but mine means more--because if someone who places 27th can still find the weekend enjoyable escapism, then so can you.

The work inbox is full, and the phone is blaring off the hook. I've woken up from Dixiecon, unfortunately.

Ethics in Diplomacy Volume I: Truthfulness After the Game

by Eber Condrell

Ethics in Diplomacy is an important discussion we need to have as a hobby, since much of the strife, anger, and vitriol that is experienced in this game is due to people not agreeing on what is ethical in the game. We are a community, which require trust and respect, built around a game where trust is often broken. We need to find a way to reconcile these facts if we are going to continue to operate and expand this hobby.

The hobby has made great strides in recent years in improving and implementing codes of conduct into various spaces. However, ethics are not the same as rules. Ethical boundaries generally aren't enforceable, and yet they must be kept. We have a duty to treat one another with respect, kindness, and common human

decency. However, ethics also come with a significant gray area. Where exactly certain issues lie in that gray area is what I wish to determine in this article, and perhaps more if I get the motivation to write again!

We all recognize the inherent aspect of betrayal in the Game of Diplomacy. Whether we like it or not lying will always be part of this game we all enjoy. My aim here is to discuss the situations that may arise in which the veracity of after-action-reports (AARs) is called into question, and to think about how best to approach these situations as players, GMs, TDs, and spectators.

What kinds of situations am I referring to here? I am not referring to the AAR discussion of "what were you

thinking when..." Or, "would you have done X if I did Y instead of Z?" While some players may try to obscure their true intentions even after the game with the goal of increasing their chances in the next game with a particular player. I will focus more on situations where actual factual information is in question, particularly anonymous draw votes.



League and Tournament games provide a unique level of competition that a friendly game might not. Most friendly games don't have contentious draw votes, they often end naturally or due to time constraints. However, it's a more serious issue in a tournament setting. Anonymous draw votes are often used. These votes tend to be vetoed by one player or other players hoping to increase their position and gain more points, in fact, the goal of hiding draw votes is to allow for this kind of play to happen more frequently. Occasionally failed draw

votes are used as a weapon by those who wish not to reveal their intention to push the game longer, as games drag deep into the night temperatures rise and frustration mounts. The players on the receiving end of such secret vetoing over many hours often just want to know who caused it, perhaps to have a little closure. Even more rarely, those responsible deny the act flat out.

I don't know much about poker, but one common practice I've observed is players placing their hands in the discard pile if they fold, thus not giving the other player's information about their hand and bluffing patterns. Perhaps a similar logic could be applied to draw votes? A player shouldn't be required to reveal information that isn't verifiable, as such information could be used against them in a future game. If someone never admits they did it, then they'll always be able to fall back on that excuse. This argument surely has merit, although the usefulness of the lie is questionable in my opinion, players may act how they please inside the bounds of whatever code of conduct the event they are participating in follows (rules not ethics).

While it may be undeniable that players can choose to do what they want, that's not what ethics is about. We are here to discuss the ramifications of our actions and determine what approach is most beneficial and ethical. In the case of draw votes, I find it is simply better to be truthful postgame. Although if you're able to pull off the deception, unlikely in my opinion, telling the truth brings out the best in people during AAR. There's no reason to be upset if everyone is honest and kind during AAR. It also builds trust as a community, something uniquely desirable because the game we play features deception so heavily.

The question remains, in a competitive setting is it ok for players to withhold information even postgame? My answer is unequivocally no. Others may come up with different answers, in such a gray area disagreement is almost a prerequisite. But I believe that telling the truth about not only draw votes but one's intentions, motivations, plans, and communications is an ethical duty that douses strife, builds trust, and promotes enjoyment among all participants. That is what we are all here for anyway, to have a little fun on a Saturday.

Lie well, and then tell the truth about it, and in the immortal words of David Hood, "I wish you brightness, bliss, and, of course, Belgium!"

An Interview with Ben Kellman

by Randy Lawrence-Hurt

Randy

Alright, so let's start with some background info. How long have you been playing Dip, and what brought you to Dixie?

Ben Kellman

I've been playing Diplomacy on and off since I learned the game in 8th grade in like 2002, but I got into playing competitively during the surge in virtual face to face play in 2020. I've met a lot of great people playing the game virtually, and Dixie was my second chance since then (after Carnage last year) to get to meet some of these people in person and play in a face-to-face rather than a virtual tournament.

I also liked the idea of playing one game a day at Dixie and having time to socialize, play some other board games, and enjoy the town a bit.

Randy

So you got into competitive play with the rise of virtual FtF in 2020 - how prepared did you feel for actual FtF? Were there any significant differences or challenges?

Ben Kellman

Having played Carnage and hosted a FtF house game since then, I felt decently comfortable playing face to face. There are a lot of differences to adjust to though. One of the biggest for me is that I struggle to remember who owns which supply centers when they're not marked, which I try to alleviate by bringing homemade center markers with me. The other is order writing compared to clicking the map - I'm sure I annoyed people I played with by taking way too long to make sure I had things straight over the course of the weekend, but I did manage to avoid any mis-orders. Those two are the biggest challenges, but I also really enjoy the flow of face-to-face negotiations. It's easier to signal to someone you want to speak to them than it is online, or to get in a quick word without needing someone to commit to entering your VC room for a conversation. And being able to see people adds an element to reading whether someone is trustworthy that turn.

Randy

Makes sense. So let's get more specific - talk about round one, what happened on your board?

Ben Kellman

My first game was the roughest for me of the three. I played Austria and got attacked Ven-Tyr, Rom-Ven by Doc Binder in Italy right off the bat. For a moment, I was

happy with myself for guessing right in Fall 01 by putting two on Trieste; but then the Turkish orders were read last and it turned out they'd tapped Serbia from Bulgaria, so Trieste was lost. After that it was a lot of diplomatic scrambling for the next few years to avoid being totally ganged up on and eliminated. I ended up working with RT to ensure Italy's initial attack didn't pay off, and briefly had a chance at the line as the west was chaotic. Turkey benefited most though, and ended up in a four way with the three western powers, while I survived on two.

Randy

Always tough when Austria gets rushed by Italy. Any insight on why Doc made the move on you early?

Ben Kellman

Doc said in the AAR that he thought he had a strong commitment from Todd Craig in Russia to work together and that's why he went directly at me. I sort of sensed that in the game and tried to prioritize my relationship with Steven Hogue in Turkey, but in reality it seems to have been more of an RT than anything else. Kind of a classic story when Italy and Austria fight I guess.



Randy

Yep, been there and seen that many times. So let's move to board two, how'd it develop?

Ben Kellman

Game two was my most interesting one of the tournament - I drew France, and started out in an EF with Karl Ronneburg. The East formed an AIR and in Fall 02, Russia and Italy helped Germany to stall our progress. So the next turn we shifted to a western triple - Emmet Wainwright in Germany gave a lot of trust to get himself back in a position to make a draw, and it worked out for a long time. Our triple pushed over the line and made it as far as Warsaw, Moscow, Venice and Ionian. But just when we were ready to start hitting Jason Mastbaum's Austria, which was still on 8, England stabbed and went from 8 to 11. Suddenly Germany was down to 4 and I was caught between a still-strong Austria and a very strong England with 7 of my 8 units in the South. There was a lot of push for a two-way EA draw, but I committed to making them grind it out, and eventually got Austria and Russia, which was still on 4 in the southeast, to help push England into taking a 3-way.

This was definitely one for me to learn from. I was so excited about the prospect of sweeping all the way across the board, that I let myself be blind to some signs of a stab coming.

**Randy**

That's so easy to do, and it's so difficult to get the balance right between pushing for centers and getting across the line, and not leaving yourself vulnerable to an ally. I'm a little surprised Austria joined you in pushing England to agree to a 3-way, since it sounds like he could've been in position to push for a 2-way; any additional insight there?

Ben Kellman

It took a lot of work over a few turns. Right as I turned north, Austria and I made some DMZ agreements which he broke after one turn. At that point he'd lied to me more recently, and England was closer to a solo position, so I committed to pulling units only from the North as I lost centers, and did pull one fleet from NAO when I lost Venice. I think this was what swayed Austria to push for the draw, though it was a balancing act between convincing him and not getting England so excited about me not prioritizing the north that he would refuse the draw.

Randy

Gotcha, that makes sense. All things considered, satisfied with the result?

Ben Kellman

Yea, it wasn't as great a result as I'd hoped for mid-game, but I was happy to get in a three way draw and give myself a chance at good finish going into the last day. Plus we didn't play all night, so we had some time to hang out and play some other games too.

Randy

Always one of the best parts of Dixie. Sidetrack, but what's your favorite non-Diplomacy board game?

Ben Kellman

I was mostly playing less stressful games to kind of take it easy between rounds. Enjoyed playing some Space Base, but I probably had the most fun playing a card game based on 1980s pro-wrestling that Todd Craig brought. Think it was called 'Wrasslin' or something like that.

Randy

I watched some of that, looked pretty fun!

Alright, back to Diplomacy. Round three rolls around. What are you hoping for, country and/or player-wise?

Ben Kellman

I didn't have a ton of expectations going in. But I had started realizing the importance of focusing on getting over the line in this scoring system, and I like playing with an ally anyway, so I was hoping to be next to someone I could work with long term. I don't think I fully realized how the time limit would affect the last round.

Randy

So did you get your ally? And how did the time play into it all?

Ben Kellman

Not exactly in the way I'd hoped. This was not my best played game, but it worked out ok. I drew England, and

had a pretty good conversation with Ed Rothenheber in France right away. Alex Craig in Italy wanted to go west, but Brian Ecton in Germany was hard to read and seemed to want to play things slow. I definitely could have navigated the western situation better, but instead I punted and went for St. Petersburg. Some suboptimal tactics slowed me down, Italy occupied France's attention, and Germany built a third fleet - so I had to do a bunch of fighting over the North Sea and in Scandinavia. Meanwhile you and Hal Schild had a solid AT going in the east. Eventually France fought off Italy and we collapsed Germany and ended up in a EFAT 4-way. I'd be curious how that looked from the East, it seemed like you and Hal had a strong alliance all game.

Forgot to answer about how the time played in. I think it just became clear in the mid-game that there wasn't going to be a chance for an endgame, which limited long-term thinking a bit and encouraged the game to wrap up.

Randy

Yeah, that was my perspective as well. Hal and I did have a good alliance, and though I wanted to stab him a couple times, I was afraid that would provide too much opportunity for the three Western powers to get across the line. You and Ed took so long to take on Germany, that I figured any break in my alliance would allow Ecton to take control of the game. Man, I really wanted the game to end in a three-way draw. I was only slightly mollified knowing that the other two boards that day both ended in 7-ways.

So that's all three rounds! To wrap up, can I get your overall thoughts about the tournament? Any major takeaways for your future games?

Ben Kellman

That makes sense. True that it was a good we were able to get the game to at least a four-way conclusion instead of a seven way, like you said.

I'm always trying to learn from my games, and I think my biggest takeaway this time was to try to maintain more strategic flexibility and not get too set on a single path - other things on the board may rule out what you had planned and if you don't adjust, your game isn't going to go in a good direction.

The tournament overall was great. Great people, fun games, an enjoyable time hanging out - with a few people I knew but mostly new people I met for the first time there. I'd just say thanks to David Hood for putting it all together, and encourage people to go next year as well as to attend other tournaments coming up.

Randy

Fantastic, thanks for your time, hope to see you at another tournament this year!

Ben Kellman

No problem! I'll be at Weasel Moot and Carnage, if you're going to either of those.

Randy

Nice! I'll definitely be at Weasel Moot, so see you there.

Weasel Moot Returns – In Person!

By Sabrini Ahuja

We would like to officially announce the return of in person Chicago Weasel Moot!

Some details about Moot. It's being held at the Hyatt in downtown Chicago, blocks away from the museums, Lake Michigan and the Sears Tower! It will take place September 24-25, 2022 with a Friday night social on September 23rd! There will be two untimed rounds (Saturday) and a timed round (Sunday) with an award ceremony following that.

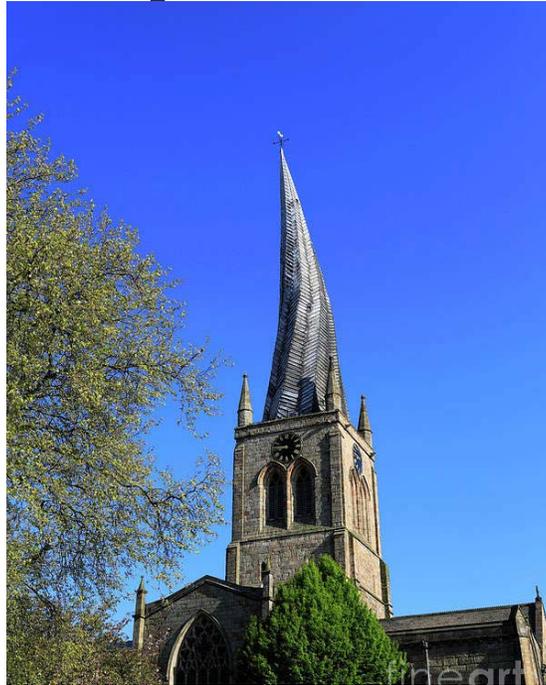
We have officially launched the moot website! (<https://moot.windycityweasels.org/>) Please check it out and also register for Moot. You can also find info on tournament setup, booking your stay and how to get to the venue as well. There is also a discount for early registration and payment!

Some info about the room block. You do not have to pay till check in and you have till 48 hours before check in to cancel. So please try to book your stay soon because we have limited availability for this rate otherwise prices will be significantly higher. If we run out of rooms please let me know asap so I can request for more rooms.

Any questions or concerns please let me know. Hope to see yall there in September xoxo

Sabrina Ahuja (warwease "at" windycityweasels.org)

Spirecon 2022



UK Face to Face Diplomacy is back!

And what's more, the post-pandemic scene is bringing British dippers a brand new event.

Hosted by Chris Woolgar et al in historic Chesterfield in Derbyshire, SpireCon (named after the famous twisted spire of the local church) is a new games convention featuring two days of Diplomacy and one day of additional gaming including Blood Bowl, DnD and other classic board games and video games.

Taking place at Chandlers Bar on 24th & 25th September 2022 and will likely see a mix of FTF veterans and newbies alike, so please do join us. Those arriving on the Friday are welcome to join us for a social evening (curry, drinks etc).

More details will appear on spirecon.uk soon. Please email jen@spirecon.uk to register early interest.

