



Notes on a Napkin

Issue 1, Jan 2022

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EDITORIAL

This was going to be a very different editorial for the launch of a new dipzine. However, part way through putting the first issue together, on 10 October, my dad died.

I want, then, to use most of my editorial to dedicate issue 1 of **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** to my dad. Which is a little strange as he only ever played Diplomacy on family get-togethers, and then there were usually other board games ahead of Dip.

He was a good man. Born and raised in Leeds, he was intelligent and dedicated to his family, my mum, my brother and me.

He and my mum were married for 55 years. Today, that's almost a miracle! There were some difficult moments; like many other people in 1980s Britain my dad had a long period of being out of work. That put a strain on things and we never really knew how much of a strain my mum was going through until he found work again. It was then, when the pressure came off, that my mum's mental health struggles came out.

Dad was there for all of us all the time. He enjoyed life. He was always laughing, always encouraging and always loving.

He was diagnosed with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) some years ago. He was put on inhalers and steroids. He caught pneumonia on three separate occasions. And still he fought on.

Eventually, in January 2021, he was taken into St James' Hospital in Leeds. If you're in the UK you'll know it as "Jimmy's". And he never got to go back home to mum.

In August he was moved to a nursing home for palliative care. He was constantly being given oxygen and, it seemed, constantly contracting infections. That's COPD, though; it's a nasty condition.

Sadly, for whatever reason, he also developed dementia. Whether that was as a result of consistently struggling to get enough oxygen or not I don't know. It gave my mum some lighter moments. He swore he'd gone on a trip out one night with some of the care workers and nurses.

"Where did you go?" she asked him.

"They put me in the back of the car," he said. "We went visiting all the care homes in Leeds."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Didn't get back until 10 O'clock last night."

"How did they get you into the car?" she asked. He was, at this point, bed-bound.

"Well, obviously," he replied, "they carried the bed to the car and put me in the back!"

This was never independently verified.

His birthday was on 8 October when he turned 79. The staff in the nursing home made him a chocolate cake and decorated his room. I couldn't go and visit him that day, but my mum and brother did.

"I'm going to take a photo of the cake," he told them.

My mum said, "We're going to have to go, though."

"It's OK I don't need you here," he replied, "I'll use my phone." He had an old, simple phone at that point because he hadn't been able to cope with the smart phone he had any more. He was forever messing with it and managed to delete numbers and even block my mum from calling him (we assume accidentally!) My brother had spent ages trying to unblock her so they had no idea how he had managed it!

"But your phone doesn't have a camera."

"What's that, then?" he asked, showing them the camera on the phone.

That was my dad, even then - unable to do the simple stuff but messing around enough to find other things he could do with the phone.

Two days later he'd developed another infection and we were called in at 2.30am on 10 October. He was too ill to move to a hospital and, anyway, they had everything they needed in the home. He died, peacefully, in his sleep.

I'll miss him, of course, but it's my mum I'm devastated for. She had, by then, got used to the fact that he wasn't coming home. But she talked to him everyday and she told me it's not hearing his voice again that hurts the most.

"He was a wonderful man." That from the care team at the home.

He was.

I don't know what he'd think about the time I spend on this hobby! He enjoyed mental challenges and loved Sudoku and logic puzzles. I wish I'd got him into it more!

I would usually mention some of the things we've got coming up but I'm aware I'm running out of space, so go look at the Contents for that!

Hope you enjoy this first issue!

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WHEN GIRLS PLAY DIPLOMACY

Lauren Lloyd



<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/3kOHJNWSHrC/maxresdefault.jpg>

PLAY DIPLOMACY: A COUCH IN A GLASGOW LIVING ROOM: OCT 2021

"You play like a..... GIRL," he strops sulkily as his army in Serbia burns brightly underneath a rather nice green one from Trieste.

"Why thank you," I smile sweetly, adjust my push-up bra and pop a square of whole-nut chocolate. *"Gonna retreat that army now, sweetie?"*

I need to jump back into bed with France before the space gets cold and he notices I've gone. The Frenchman is sweet, obliging – if a little dull. Him breaching DMZs in Pie/GOL/WES is like tackling a buxom, naked girl on the rugby field. It won't happen.

I know what he means (my grumpy Turk). Misogyny is alive and well in Diplomacy. Accusing me of playing like a girl is meant to be an insult. An accusation of subpar, un-fun play.

Meanwhile I play Diplomacy like a Renegade Disney Princess. Phenomenal cleavage, emerald silk ballgown (I'm Italy of course) and bomber boots.

I joyously sweep across Austria, float some boats in and sneak-convoy to Turkish shores, whilst making gin-cocktails - *just like a girl*.

It's a choreographed dance.

I shoot, smash, stab. I sing and eat cake, surrounded by animated birds and squirrels.

Romance and flowers spray from wounds.

Hearts gush with colour and beauty where there should be blood.



I choke enemies out with my thighs. Italy is aspirational and hot, don't-cha know.

I keep the muscled France and Russia warm, dripping, eager and attentive, looking like right tasty snacks to be devoured later.

I play Diplomacy like Harley Quinn in *The Suicide Squad*.

Colourful, eccentric, intelligent, brutal, messy, deliciously horny, utterly delightful.

AND IT'S SO MUCH FUN!

Let's go back in time for a second. Where it all started. Four years ago, when a friend asked if I would join [Play Diplomacy online](#), so that he could learn the rules of an old 50's board game...

I should know better. We only just buried our copy of *Jumanji* to the beat of a jungle drum and a bunch of rhinos.

Cue cinematic flashback...

PLAY DIPLOMACY: A COUCH IN A GLASGOW LIVING ROOM: FEB 2017

"Not my kind of thing. Don't have time. Besides, I'd be shit."

He looks crestfallen, with eyes that plead.

"I don't have anyone else to play with, Lauren. Please. One game. For me? You never know, it might be fun."

I am resolute. I'm a doctor. I work full-time. I have an oversized red Labrador. Most importantly, I have three teenage sons who have just discovered the joy of *Dungeons and Dragons*... Now *that's* proper gaming.

"Dave, it's for blokes with no social lives. It'll be full of sad, sexist twats. Women don't play online war games."

Aha, how wrong I am.

One game later and I AM HOOKED. I pull up my big-girl pants and enter two more (ranked no less, against some of Play Dip's Big Gun's - literally).

Something profound happens to me during those first few months. Yes, I learn about fleets and coasts and convoys. But more significantly I learn two things:

Firstly, I rediscover how joyous PLAYING WITH ABANDON is.

Secondly, I learn how important women are to challenging toxic forces that deliberately push out feminine influences. Online gaming is wildly misogynistic. Designed by blokes, for blokes. Look at the language, look at the pictures, look at the forum posts and public press. That's before you even start dealing with some of those messages. Ugh!

By playing radically, communicating in increasingly creative ways – women push at the margins. We influence change. Come join me, girls. We kick ass.

HOW COOL IS THAT!?!

Clearly, Diplomacy is anything but a waste of time. It's an imperative, a call to action for women (and other marginalised groups) everywhere.

Realisation dawns - GAMES MATTER.

WOMEN AND GAMING

When I start playing Diplomacy, meeting a woman in a game is akin to meeting a blue unicorn crying. Everyone assumes I'm a bloke pretending to be a woman to get some kind of game advantage. Apparently, according to legend and misinformed stereotype, women are a soft touch, easily manipulated, less likely to stab. HA! How little they know us.

To understand *why* means delving into the sociology of gender and play.

From the moment we're born, we're forced into a binary world of male versus female.

"It's a girl!" they cry, meaning a childhood of cookers, kitchens, Disney Princess outfits, hairstyling boutiques, hoovers, dolls and mini-irons. Play has a practical purpose, setting us up for our role in life: looking beautiful; raising babies; cooking and housework. We aren't given the same opportunity to play for play's sake, despite knowing that lifelong play is important to joy, growth and quality of life.



'Playing like a girl' is one thing. 'Playing like a woman' means spinning another plate between the children, the career, the house, the shopping, the misogyny, the poor pay and gendered career prospects. You get an unexpected half hour and you pace the room because you don't know what to do with it. Play is never given the same significance or nurtured the way it is for boys.

How men and women use 'leisure time' as adults evolves quite differently. All those baby girls who will never know the joy of spending a day off work in front of a PS5.

But the world is not binary. Childhood labels can be damaging. We know that. Gender dysphoria is real; so is bullying, self-harm, depression and suicide. These labels are socially constructed. Early on, children gravitate to the toys and stereotypes they've been conditioned towards, irrespective of any biological differences. In general, men are still paid more, hold more managerial and boardroom positions, and do less childcare. The world still promotes patriarchal systems, structure and thinking.

Cue the pantomime boos.

BOOOOOOOOOOOO.....

PLAYFUL WOMEN

It's hard to write an article about women and Diplomacy without some reference to feelings of safety.

There are occasional jerks online (and face-to-face), just as there are jerks in the outside world, in the pub and in the school dinner queue. That's life. That's why women are the quick-witted ones.

In some ways, Diplomacy is more susceptible to toxicity aimed at women. It's competitive, based on power over others, betrayal and manipulation. Egos are tied to a series of wins and losses. Some of us even get a thrill from tracking our statistics and ranking.

Personally, I know there are times when I've not felt good enough to play at the 'big boy's table.' There are also times I've just accepted open sexism and sexual harassment in the interest of fitting in and/or not being stabbed.

There is nothing wrong with a feminist approach which emphasises self-care to deal with it. 'Self-care' typically refers to finding ways to emotionally and physically maintain your health. Taking time out and embracing 'me-time.' Self-care is good. It's important. But it also lacks the deliberate and focused potential of play to challenge a toxic or stressful environment at source.

What's better than protesting and activating from the inside-out through laughter, fun and beating people at their own game?

A CALL TO ACTION



Fortunately, the percentage of female gamers is growing, which is a great thing for gaming generally. Women need women to make games more appealing, inclusive and FUN.

But if you ask the general populous of women, they'll react the same way I did in 2017. It's "too violent," a "waste of time," it "rots brains," it "takes too

long," is "too sexist," "I'm no good at it," it's "something my kids do," "I'd rather live in the real world," it's "for geeks with no social life."

If online gaming discriminates against me as a cis, white, middle-class, woman, it must discriminate against other minority groups, as well as those facing financial, educational, cultural, environmental or technological barriers. Finding time to play is afforded to the middle classes.

Some businesses are at last beginning to recognise the value of building play into daily practices but we are a long way from making it accessible to, and valued by, everyone.

PLAY is the way to change the world, from the inside-out.

We all need to make time to do it, and do it radically, creatively, joyously.

Play is the perfect space for changing minds and bodies, and disrupting patriarchal hegemonies. We need a new social movement.

Sometimes play, activism and laughter trumps even the best self-care.

Who's with me?

I am the Diplomacy anti-hero Harley Quinn!

"Move that fleet North, France. Trust me, Iberia's fine. I'm all about alliances of equality."

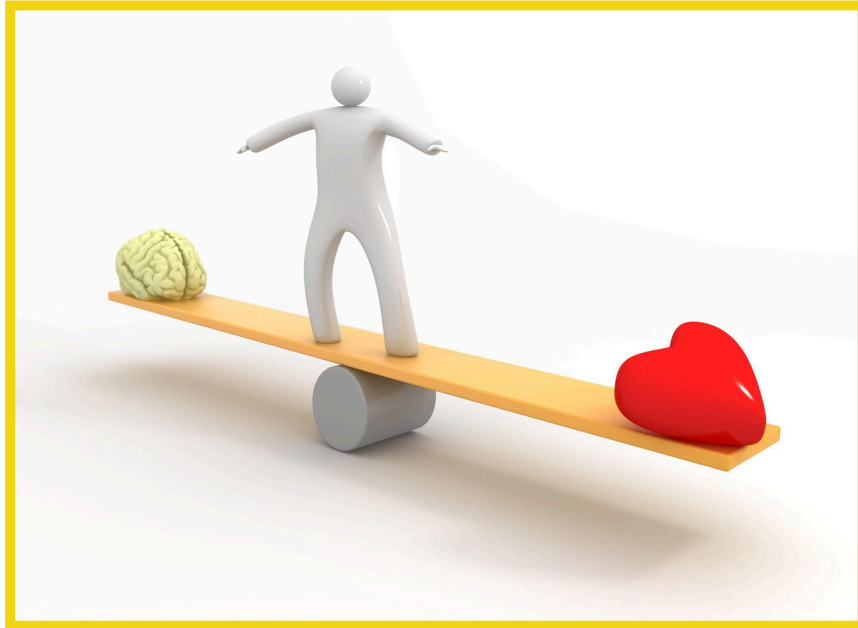
"And pour me another cocktail, you handsome devil."

THE TRUE OBJECT OF ALL HUMAN LIFE IS PLAY.

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HEARTS AND MINDS

Mal Arky



https://executiveleader.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/shutterstock_123322447-2.jpg

I play most of my Diplomacy online. I've used a number of different sites - [Playdiplomacy](#), [webDiplomacy](#) and [Backstabbr](#) - and I've enjoyed playing on all of them. I've also used the Diplomacy apps although I didn't enjoy those!

One of the reasons I don't enjoy the apps is that there doesn't seem to be much of a range of deadlines and the choice of deadlines tends to be short ones. I have a life outside of Diplomacy, believe it or not, and it's quite a busy one. I can't play to deadlines that are too short.

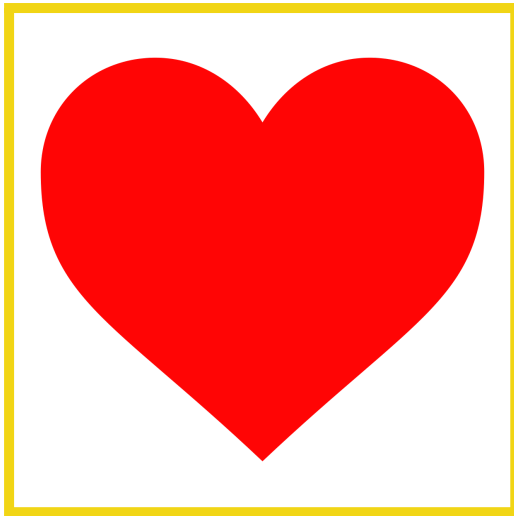
Frankly, I shouldn't *have* to play to short deadlines! None of us should. Diplomacy is a game that involves communication and a lot of it. If you don't have time to communicate, how are you going to play the game well?

I don't speak for everyone, of course. There must be plenty of people out there who enjoy playing to shorter deadlines and can do well with those. They must be more economical with their messages than I am!

This is an example of the difficulty of playing Diplomacy online: How do we balance the desires of some players with the needs of others?

What this comes down to is how do we keep people playing online? Every site has people who join the site, try the game there, and then disappear. Something hasn't hooked them and, potentially, the community, and the Dip Hobby as a whole, is poorer for it. How do sites *keep* the newbies?

What do we want from a site?



Diplomacy, of course, is a game and the most fundamental desire when it comes to playing a game is that we *enjoy* it. After all, if you're not enjoying something that you have *chosen* to do, why would you be doing it?

On a very fundamental level, then, what the websites should be aiming to achieve is create an enjoyable atmosphere. If you want to keep someone on site, then, you need that person to enjoy being - and playing - there.

The problem with this is that we all have different ideas about what constitutes an enjoyable game of Diplomacy. Is it that there's a lot of communication between the players? Is it that the game moves on quickly? Is it about the players being competitive or friendly - and do we, as players, have to be one or the other?

Comments on site forums seem to indicate that the frustration of getting a game going is a big deal, and I can understand that. Linked to this is the number of games affected by players who simply drop out of a game.

The problem for the sites is that this is a problem which seems to have no solution. There's nothing you can do about a player who joins a game and then doesn't play it, after all.

One solution about this seems to be that site members want these people penalised in some way. Knocking ratings points off them is one possible solution. This isn't a very *effective* one, though. A lot of people who drop from games simply aren't *interested* in the rankings.

More effective, perhaps, would be blocking them from playing any other scored games until they've completed an unscored game from start to finish. In other words, 'prove' they're not going to drop from another game quite as readily.

This is always going to penalise people who have dropped from a game for genuine reasons: health, family emergencies, or loss of access at a key time, for example. So it isn't the *ideal* solution, perhaps, but then again, *is* there an ideal solution?

This is different to being prevented from entering games until you *prove* you're reliable, though. I know another action a lot of players want is to prevent new members from joining some games. Let them prove they're reliable before letting them into the ranked games.

For me, this is just too exclusive. If, in your early games, you're forced to play against players who are all new, when a significant number of these will be trying Diplomacy as a game and don't really know much about it, you're going to face an increased number of drop-outs. If you happen to be new to the site but not to the game, this is going to be incredibly frustrating and leave you dissatisfied with the site. Are you going to *stay* there? The chances are that you're not going to bother.

Sites want to attract, and *keep*, new people, not shove them away and condemn them to a poor first experience. If your first game on the site is plagued by players dropping from it, why would that entice you to stay there?

Another issue, as I've mentioned above, is getting a game going. One solution to this is to have a 'quick start' option. This is a game with standard features: allocation of powers, deadline lengths, etc. It would allow players to join the game that is currently forming and, when that is full, you're playing!

This is an interesting idea. When you go to a Dip site, you'll look for a game to play. You need to look for a game you *can* play, so one that has deadlines you can keep. If you're new, you may want to learn the game, so you will be looking for a game which allows you to ask questions.

Playdiplomacy has a type of game that is ideal for people looking to learn Diplomacy. It is called a 'Schools' game. It wasn't designed with learning the game in mind, but the way the games run is perfect for this process.

The 'Schools' game format was initially created for teachers to use. There were - and are - a *lot* of teachers who use Diplomacy in their lessons. The format allows teachers to set-up the game, specify the deadline lengths they want, and add players

to the game. They can even create the accounts that are going to be playing in the game. When the game is underway, the 'Teacher' can post instructions in the Public Press, and even message players directly. If a player has a question, they can post in Public Press or ask the Teacher.

Playdip isn't the only site that has this feature or something similar but it is, perhaps, the best example of this. I'm sure you can see how this format is perfect for introducing new players, or new site members, to Diplomacy. Unfortunately, the information about these games is all but hidden away on the site's Forum. Why not, then, allow an experienced player, who is willing to run a game as a mentor, to set-up a game, and have it advertised on the site's home page?

I worry a little bit about 'quick start' games, though. While I think it is a good idea, I can't help wondering about what the *ideal* deadline length would be? A lot of players prefer shorter deadlines: on Playdip a lot of games have a 12 hour deadline. This, for me, is far too short. Diplomacy is about communicating: if you're playing against someone from the other side of the world, how can you communicate effectively in twelve hours? (I know, some people do, apparently!)

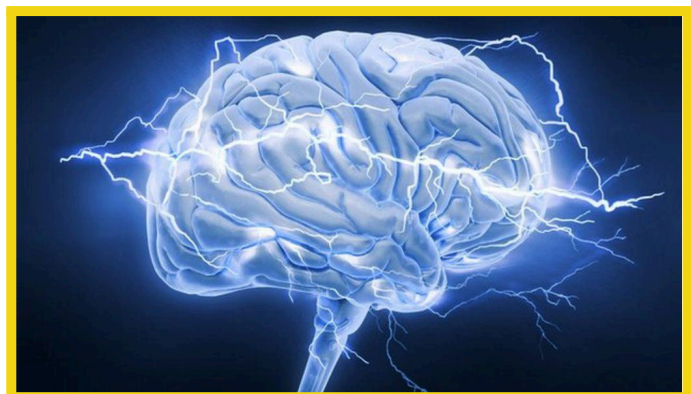
My instinct is that a standard deadline would be 24 hours. For me, still too short; I prefer 2 days as an absolute minimum, preferably 3 days to be on the safe side. And I'm not the only one.

The issue that would need to be tested is how a 'quick start' game would affect the creation of other games. Would it make getting other games started more difficult, with the range of options on offer?

What do we need from a site?

This is something that also needs to be considered. If we're going to keep people on the sites, what do we need to be in place?

The question here is more objective, I suggest. We need sites to be *interesting*. How we achieve that is perhaps more of a problem.



It's pretty easy to say that, if Diplomacy isn't interesting enough, then we're on a loser. And, as a Dip player, I'd agree with that. If the person who has joined the site likes the game, then they're part way to staying.

Perhaps, then, we need to be able to sell playing on *that* site as being a more positive experience. This is partly down to how the site portrays itself, and how the membership portrays it.

What is *great* about playing Diplomacy on your site? Does your site effectively communicate that? What can it do to show it?

[Playdiplomacy](#) (I'm aware I'm using this site as an example but it's where I play most of my Diplomacy so I know it best) is a very text-heavy site on its home page. There are some images but nothing spectacular. And that's a shame.

It has an olde worlde appeal, I guess, and frankly I like it. But that's because it appeals to *me*. I'm a history freak - sue me. The cartoony figure that is used as the site icon (only on the main site - it's different on the Forum) doesn't really add much. The background in the header is a stylised version of the main map Diplomacy uses. The image of the letters overlaid with a bloody knife encapsulates the game for experienced players and could be intriguing enough to new players.

Compare this to the home pages of webDiplomacy and Backstabbr. [webDip's](#) home page is about as appealing as the message you get when you look for a site that doesn't exist any more - incredibly text-heavy with no images at all. [Backstabbr's](#) home page has an image of their map - which is a dull, pretty uninspiring one - and the other half of the page is, again, text.

I know a home page has to provide information but it *has* to be interesting. Set up a separate landing page, image heavy. Make the images interesting, dramatic, captivating (I'm not suggesting scantily-clad models around a Dip board, by the way). And make them *inclusive* as well as informative. And make the current home pages accessible through a link to the site or provide the registration process on the landing page and, once registered, players can be taken to the home page by default.

This is another problem with Diplomacy sites: inclusivity. Now, a site's membership could be very diverse - we don't know because we don't know the *people* behind the usernames. We can learn about them through the forums (for webDiplomacy and Playdiplomacy - Backstabbr doesn't have an associated forum as far as I'm aware) and perhaps this is more important than being able to *see* diversity.

Gaming - board gaming or otherwise - has a problem with diversity. Go to *any* Dip site or app and the vast majority of players are male, for instance. Maybe that's something to do with the male psyche, I don't know, but there are plenty of female Dip players out there, too! (Apologies if you identify as non-binary.)

And that's not to mention race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc. Actually, given that Dip sites tend to be English language sites (even if it's American English), that's a problem in itself. Quite often you'll see players mentioning how another person seems to be 'illiterate' when what's happening is that the player is communicating in what isn't their *first* language. Pedantry - and I'm speaking as someone who can be pretty pedantic - has a lot to answer for!

There is something of a rivalry between sites. This isn't bad, per se, but it *does* give a negative, exclusive vibe to a site. When you go onto a forum and read posts from players who are simply playing down another Dip site, no matter what the motivation, then it leaves a negative impression. What, you don't *want* members to play on your site?

When it comes down to it, no-one can say what makes the experience of using a Diplomacy site a universally positive one. However, for me, the sites don't seem to prioritise it and I think they're missing a trick by doing so.

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GAMES?

So I was considering running a Diplomacy game through the zine and on the [Diplomaticon Forum](#) but that depends on you lot.

If you're interested in playing a game of Dip that I'd GM, let me know. It wouldn't rely on publishing deadlines and would be either Play-by-Forum or Play-by-Email. Updates and after action reports would be published in the zine.

Register on the [Diplomaticon Forum](#) to take part.

WHAT TO DRINK WHILE PLAYING DIPLOMACY

Richard Solensky

My mind tends to wander off into strange areas a lot. To cut a long digression short, I began to wonder what beverages (alcoholic if possible) would it be appropriate to sip while representing each nation in Diplomacy...

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY



At first, I thought the Dual Monarchy would be the hardest, because I couldn't think of anything off the top of my head. But a quick online search, and it turned out to be as easy as any other. There's a sort of fruit brandy in Hungary called "pálinka". The European Union has decided that only the versions made in Hungary or a small part of Austria can use the name. Made from fruits like plums, pears, apricots, or cherries ("If it will make jam, it will make pálinka" is a saying), it can be

sipped (room temperature, please, to bring out the fruit flavors) anytime you darn well want.

<https://likelocals.blog/palinka-a-guide-to-hungarys-national-drink/>

ENGLAND

If you want alcohol, it's got to be gin. I know there's a heck of a lot of great stuff being done with gin these days (I currently am working on a bottle of Canadian gin that is a bright yellow in color), but stick with a classic London Dry. If you need to feel snobbish, try an Old Tom gin. The usual Gin and Tonic (with lime, to prevent scurvy) will do, if you don't want to sip it neat.

Don't want alcohol? Then a nice cuppa tea is the way to go. George Orwell gives what is the generally accepted method – though he leaves out an important step. Around his seventh step, just after you've poured the water onto the tea in the teapot, you should cover the pot with something to keep it warm and wait four or five minutes to let the tea steep.

<https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/a-nice-cup-of-tea/>

I know all these weird green and chai and even white teas are fashionable these days, but by all that's holy, stick with proper black tea (so I don't have to hunt you down and convoy an army into Yorkshire to teach you the error of your ways).

FRANCE

Do I even have to tell you? You're French. You drink wine with breakfast, lunch, dinner, and late-night snacks. You even know which wine pairs best with whatever you find in the fridge when you go looking for a late-night snack. Other places, like California, Italy, Australia, and Chile, may think they know how to make wine, but at best they just bottle old grape juice. Know the secret code on the label designations and choose one for your personal favorite.

GERMANY

Not only is Munich the most important supply center on the board, it's also the home of Oktoberfest – and arguably the only bar (one can even call it a brewpub, since they make it on site!) in the world with its own classic drinking song! So pour yourself a liter of the classic Hofbrau lager, and sing along!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duLI-CgNmhc>

ITALY

France has cornered the market on wine, so that's that. Austria-Hungary has the "after dinner digestive brandies" locked up, so we can't use grappa, the Italian entry into that category. How about something that every bar – even your home bar – should have: Campari. Invented in Italy, it's classed as "bitters", but isn't as strong as what you usually think of (i.e. Angostura). It's the key ingredient in some of the simplest – and most popular – cocktails. Equal parts Campari, sweet vermouth, and soda water is the Americano. Swap out the soda water for gin, and you have a Negroni. Use whiskey instead of gin, and it's a Boulevardier. Have fun experimenting!

RUSSIA

Vodka. Duh. By the bones of Alexander Nevsky, use simple, plain vodka. None of the flavored crap. Drink it neat, in small glasses, and as cold as a winter in Siberia. Drink a toast when Turkey doesn't move into Armenia. Drink a toast when Germany lets you have Sweden. Drink a toast when you persuade England to move to the Channel instead of the Norwegian Sea.....

TURKEY

It was through Constantinople that coffee was introduced to Europe, so let's honor the Ottomans by making a proper cup of Turkish Coffee. It's not hard if you have the right coffee and equipment. Think of it as Turkish espresso... It's actually kind of cool to make it yourself, following the ritual of boiling and cooling and boiling again. I like mine with a

hint of cardamom....

<https://www.turkishcoffeeworld.com/How-to-make-Turkish-Coffee-s/54.htm>

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VARIANTS**WHITE PRESS****GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY****Hugh Polley**

*This idea for a variant was contributed by Hugh and he's chosen to call it "White Press Gunboat Diplomacy." I don't like the name personally - if it's a Gunboat variant then there's **no** press! If I were going to call it something, I think I'd go for "Courier Diplomacy" given that there is no direct messaging between players.*

But it's not my variant so I'm presenting it as Hugh presented it to me, with some editing to clarify. Let us know your thoughts.

Each player is known only by their ruling title, such as Czar. Press with this title byline is reserved for the player controlling the power; all other presses can be black.

Players can send one private message to another player, through the GM, only after a player has proposed a deal in his White press. You CANNOT reply privately to a message forwarded by the Game Master.

For example: Press - The Czar offers Galicia to be unoccupied by Austria and Russia. Austria could send a private reply which the GM forwards to the Russian without any player identity information. So Austria could send an email to the Russian player, through the GM, *without* the Austrian player's byline, eg: "The Emperor accepts the Czar's generous proposal if you support me into Bulgaria." The Russian

player CANNOT reply back privately to the Austrian conditional part of the acceptance.

Optional Rule: The GM may play one or more countries, but that country can never use the support order. He may also not send out messages to the other players in the game.

This variant is a modified Gunboat game. It may be a pain for the GM as he must deal with the messaging. You could farm out this job to a trusted subscriber or friend. You could create a separate email account for this part of the Game Master's job. This Gunboat may be more fun for game watchers as you can follow the diplomacy, which is only 20% private.

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JOIN IN!

Why not contribute to **NOTES ON A NAPKIN?**

You can see details of how to contribute on the **NOAN website**, or send something directly to the editor at **diplomaticonpublishing@gmail.com**.

I'm looking for:

Strategy articles

Discussion topics

***From the Archives* articles**

***Variants* articles**

Letters

Suggestions

And, if you've a lot to say, you can write a series of articles.

Go on - take part - the more the merrier!

SURVIVING 1901

I. SECURING AN ALLY

Oxmeister

For newer players - something I considered myself not so long back - 1901 is the first and perhaps largest obstacle to get over in order to have a good game. Central to your quest to start your game well is securing an ally and, just as importantly, avoiding your neighbours allying together against you.

Though my overall record in Diplomacy is unremarkable, I always manage to emerge from the first year with an ally, which at least gets me into the later stages of the game. If you're not managing to get past first base consistently, try a few of these tips in your next game.

Communicate early and often



Communication is perhaps the most important skill in Diplomacy in general but never is it more important than in the early stages. If keeping a constant line with all six of your fellow players is often too much, make sure Spring 1901 is the exception and invest time in this phase. The early bird catches the worm and this is true in many Diplomacy games too, so make sure your neighbours are first talking with you, rather than each other.

Be flexible first, and direct soon after

I find in online play that around 2/3's of players will want to arrange an alliance right off the bat (if for no other reason to ensure that they aren't the target) but the rest will want to wait a few phases before committing strongly to anybody. To avoid alienating either camp, make sure your opening messages cover a desire to work out

local issues first, and hint at your interest in discussing a longer-term plan if they are interested. Most players will be. Once you get a positive response though, don't hang around – get to the point that you'd like to carve up Turkey, and go about forming a plan.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket

Too many people talk mostly with just one close neighbour when looking for an ally. One reason for this is a desire to play to a specific game plan. This can be risky. Even though you might like playing an E/F alliance as France, if you ignore Germany, and England actually much prefers an E/G alliance, you could find yourself in trouble.

Another reason can be a desire to avoid mutually exclusive suggestions/promises to neighbours in case they talk to each other about your plans. While this can happen, my experience is players very rarely share press verbatim this early in a game. Indeed, conversely, a player who wants to gossip or manipulate will be willing to tell the other neighbour you've suggested certain things whether or not you do so.

Bottom line: don't worry about what you can't control - make a strong pitch to all your neighbours, and simply choose your favourite if everyone seems interested.



Keep your pitches sensible

This one is key - you need to make sure you are not asking for too much or too little. Many players try to be too ambitious in their diplomacy and end up becoming a target.

In a recent tournament game I played in as France, the German player made a strong pitch to me for Belgium for 3 builds. They had made the same request to England. This made it too easy for myself and England to come together as allies.

In the next round, I got Germany, and this time the French player opened with a request for Belgium (via Burgundy) but assured me he'd be my "loyal ally to the end" if I went along with it. There was never a chance to test the sincerity of that pledge, as the greedy French player was on the end of a 3-on-1 attack by Fall 01.

If you show a desire to work together with your neighbours in a way that benefits you both about equally, most players will want to work with you.

Don't make yourself an appealing target

There are many ways to attract the wrong kind of attention, but it revolves around being too loose with information, or agreeing too easily to requests that make you vulnerable. If you've not had a lot of press with the Russian player then a DMZ in Galicia might be too risky as Austria. If you are taking a gamble by not covering a supply centre in the Fall, do other powers really need to know?



When telling other powers the moves you will use, first try and determine if they can use the information against you, and be wary of those who press you to say what you will do with a unit if they could directly benefit from exploiting that information. A balance must be found between being transparent enough to build trust and being careful with information, so this one requires careful judgement.

So there you go!

Hopefully you've secured an ally, and now you have a chance in the game. With that out of the way, my next piece will be on the next part of the 1901 puzzle – interpreting the early moves.

Until then, good luck on the battlefield!

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

“THE ODD THEORY”

Reviewed by Mal Arky



https://64.media.tumblr.com/9110eaf1123a7b80ae1c3a45baa0b511/tumblr_n5y7oeOp501qkliv0o1_1280.jpg

Diplomacy World was first published in January 1974. That’s some time to keep going; there’s a reason it is known as the Grande Dame of Diplomacy zines.

In issue #1 Edi Birsan, no less, presented a discussion piece on how Diplomacy games pan out. He called his piece “The Odd Theory.” His argument was that a Dip game would break down into three stages:

1. 5 players v 2 players

2. 3 players v 2 players
3. 2 players v 1 player

You can read the article in [DW#1](#) but I wouldn't try. The production quality back then would have been good, but scanned and uploaded it's poor. So try in the [Diplomacy Archive](#) instead.

Edi starts with a premise:

But let us suppose on some distant planet there are seven players who fit the two critical needs for a "well-played game of Diplomacy" and the fools, having nothing more to credit to their existence, actually sit down one Sunday afternoon and have a go at it over the board. If that game ends in anything less than a three-way draw, they have violated the basic assumptions that allowed them to be chosen for the game! In other words, a "well-played" game between seven top-notch win-only players is a three-way tie at least, and possibly a two-way tie, and definitely NOT a seven-way tie as myth would hold up to light.

I should state that the "two critical needs" are, Edi asserts, that the players are highly competent in the game and that they play to win or stop someone else winning.

What Edi is trying to do in his article is debunk the theory (he calls it a "myth") that a well-played game of Diplomacy will end in a 7-way draw. Let's put aside whether this is something we can agree with. What we're looking at here is whether Edi's "Odd Theory" makes sense.

Edi is really presenting a way of overcoming this rather pessimistic view of Diplomacy that leads to high-number draws. What he says is that, initially, the game could feature a 5-player agreement to eliminate 2 other players. The 2 don't stand a chance.

There are, then 5 players remaining. Now the game breaks down into 3 of the 5 working to eliminate the other 2. This he identifies as a narrow advantage for the 3-player bloc but that the 2-player bloc shouldn't be able to survive the game.

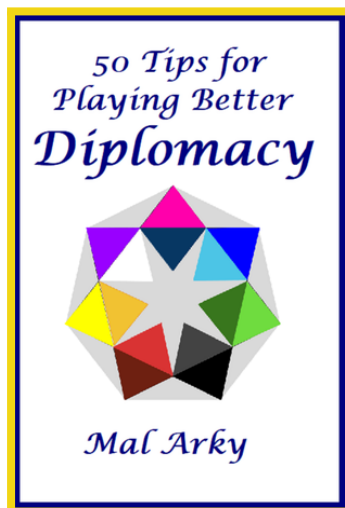
When there are 3 players remaining, they have the following options:

- Accept the 3-way draw, or

- 2 players unite against the other and go for a 2-way draw.

It's important to recognise what he's doing here - presenting a way of narrowing the game down to its ultimate battle and overcoming the 6- or 7-player draw. What he *isn't* doing is presenting the perfect game: in fact, he states there is no perfect game. The assumption that all players in a game are playing to the same outcome, he says, is untrue and that to have 7 equally competent players is unlikely.

On this, I think most of us would agree with him. I'm not just talking about the one-off games you might get online or in FTF meets, either. You could put the seven 'best' Dip players in any sizable community together and they would have different approaches to a game, or play the game differently... assuming there is a definition of what is the best Dip play or who are the best Dip players!



[Well, of course these players will have read my book "[50 Tips for Playing Better Diplomacy](#)" but that isn't the key definition!]

Frankly, my experience of playing Diplomacy suggests that aiming to create a 5-player initial alliance is something that doesn't happen. It's difficult enough putting a triple alliance in place without looking at a quintuple one!

However, I guess that in this situation you might be looking at something like France, England, Russia, Turkey and Italy, with Germany and Austria-Hungary being the weak links. That isn't necessarily the *only* way this could form, of course, but Russia, having a foot in the north and south, would seem to make a good pivot around which a quintuple alliance could turn.

Next, the quintuple (d)evolves into a triple: Russia and Turkey's *Juggernaut* might be two points of this alliance, and France is the natural third ally, given that they aren't threatened by the *Jug* at this point.

Alternatively, the *Triple Entente* might unite to attack Italy and Turkey, given that the latter two powers are potentially at odds in the south. Or even the *United Church Triple* of England, Russia and Italy combine to eliminate two side powers.

However this triple alliance forms, the idea is that they have the advantage over the two other players. If we're talking the *Mastodon* triple (France, Turkey and Russia)

then France and Russia sandwich England, while Turkey and Russia take down Italy... perhaps.

Finally, we're left with three players remaining. What happens then? In the scenario I'm looking at above, the *Juggernaut* could press on against France and work for a 2-way draw. Or any combination of 2 players could unite to stop/eliminate the third power. Or the 3-way draw, given a balance of power scenario, is the ultimate outcome.

There are some questions here (aside from the questions about which alliances could form) around some of Edi's assumptions. The first is his focus on the allies having a balanced number of SCs. The 5-way alliance, he suggests, would involve all powers holding 6/7 SCs once the other 2 players have been eliminated. Similarly, when we get down to the final 3 players, he says they'll hold 11/12 SCs each.

Again, this isn't how games often pan out, but (remembering that he is suggesting a way to achieve this outcome) perhaps this is the ideal way to progress. Unfortunately, ideals don't often survive practicalities in Diplomacy.

When we get to the final shoot-out, one player could have a larger number of SCs than either of the others. This presents a different outcome than a possible 2-way draw. A 3-way draw is likely, with the 2 smaller powers uniting to prevent the leader from winning, or the leader could potentially press on and gain a solo. Admittedly, the solo *shouldn't* result because the two should unite but, on occasion, it does.

I also don't like a couple of things that Edi focuses on as part of this idea: the 2-way draw and the 'Strong Second'. For me, for instance, the 2-way draw is anathema. It means that *neither* player is looking to win the game. When we're looking at players who are seeking to win, or prevent someone else from winning, this shouldn't happen.

I can see, though, in a tournament, this might be all that one or both players need to progress. In that scenario, then a 2-way draw might be acceptable. But, again, is there any reason why at least *one* of them shouldn't attempt to draw the game?

The 'Strong Second' idea is nonsensical within any format of the game. The idea is that, while one player wins the game, a player who finishes on a higher number of SCs should get credit for finishing second.

I simply don't understand this. What difference does the number of SCs make when you've lost the game? Are you in any better position than someone who ended the game on 1 SC, or even anyone who has been eliminated? Someone won - you lost!

In the modern Dip Hobby I think the idea of the 'Strong Second' seems to have gone from the game, as it should. Unfortunately there are still a significant number of people who feel a 2-way draw is a good result. Well, it is - for the 2 players involved. It isn't for Diplomacy.

I'm not ending this review of Edi's 'Odd Theory' there. Far too negative! And these ideas that were part of the Dip Hobby then shouldn't be allowed to dominate what Edi is saying. Just a shame he ended his article this way.

Edi is suggesting a way to break down a high quality game of Diplomacy to prevent it becoming an uninspiring event. I was going to say a "dull game" but it doesn't need to be dull - there could well be a lot of to-ing and fro-ing to and still end in a 6-player draw, simply because no one player or alliance can make any real progress!

As I say, I'm not sure it would work as Edi describes it, if only because it's difficult to get the type of alliance in the Early Game he envisions. Still, it's intriguing and it *does* make sense!

Next issue I'm going to look at a riposte to Edi's ideas from another illustrious member of the Dip Hobby, Lewis Pulsipher. His article is called "A Myth Defended" and he argues that a game between 7 equally competent players *should* end in a 7-player draw.



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HOBBY NEWS

This issue there's a number of different items to cover.

Personalities

Taken from **Diplomacy World #156**:

Sad to pass on the information that **Giovanni Cesarini** has died.

If you are in the FTF Hobby, and based in Europe, you may know this Dippyist.

He was involved in the Hobby in Italy and, I'm told, a lovely man. It's a shame to hear that anyone who made such a positive impression on the Hobby has gone.

Let's hope there are more like him.

Additionally, a name I recognise from variants and articles: **Conrad von Metzke**.

Thankfully, Conrad is still with us but he's retired from the Hobby completely.

From what I've read, he has been ill for a number of years and this illness has finally caught up with him.

Conrad has his own entry in the **Diplomacy A-Z** (under M) and he was one of the people there at the start of the Postal Hobby. His Dipzine, *Costaguana*, was one of the first published.

Apparently, Conrad was a well-known faker, even producing a fake copy of a Belgian zine.

You can read much more about him in *DW #156*. I simply want to end by wishing him all the best.

On-going and Up-coming Tournaments & Leagues

Face-to-Face

Cascadia Open 2022

CANCELLED

TotalCon 36

25-27 Feb 2022

Best Western Royal Plaza,
Marlborough, MA, USA

See: [TotalCon](#)

Regatta VI (I think!)

11-13 March 2022

Denver, Colorado

Email TD [Manus Hand](#) at
manus2hand@gmail.com

See: [Armada Dip](#)

PoppyCon 2022

23/24 Apr 2022

Moonee Ponds, Melbourne, Australia

Email TD [Andrew Goff](#) at
acgoff@hotmail.com

(This is a house event - you'll need to email to get the address!)

Badass Whipping

29 Apr - 1 May 2022

Hotel de Anza, San Jose, CA, USA

Email TD [Siobhan Nolen](#) at
badassdiplomacy@gmail.com

DixieCon 36

26-29 May 2022

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Email TD [David Hood](#) at
davidhood@dixiecon.com

See: [DixieCon](#)

Virtual FTF & Online

DBN Invitational 2022 (Finals)

12-20 & 26 Feb 2022

See: [Diplomacy Broadcast Network Invitational](#)

T-Blitz 2022 (I believe sign-ups closed 3 Jan)

3-30 Jan 2022

See: [diplomania.fr](#)
(Francophone)

Nexus Gunboat III

Sign-ups close 15 Jan 2022

See: [Gunboat III](#)

There are other tournaments later in the year but that's all I'm going to look at for now. I've excluded *most* tournaments that are on-going.

If you have information for future tournaments, please let me know by emailing me at diplomaticonpublishing@gmail.com.

Diplomacy Links

Below are selected links to Diplomacy sites where you can play Diplomacy or where Diplomacy is organised. If any of these links don't work, please let me know.

- [Online Play](#)
- [Face-to-Face and Virtual FTF](#)
- [Blogs, Forums and Podcasts](#)
- [YouTube Diplomacy sites](#)
- [Diplomacy Resources](#)

If there are any other links to similar things, please let me know and I'll add them to the list (and to the website).

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EXTENDED EDITORIAL

I *won't* be doing this every issue! I'm only doing it in this issue because I've had to delay publication and I think you deserve an explanation.

It's been a bad couple of months since we buried my dad on 5 November 2021. Without going into too much detail, I've spent time in hospital. One of my lungs collapsed three times (yeh, *three* times) and I contracted pneumonia. Or, perhaps, I contracted pneumonia and my lung couldn't be arsed working.

So I went through December either in hospital or at home doing nothing at all Dip-related. In that time, the deadline came and went and gave a little wave as it passed.

I'm happy to say I'm well now. What it did mean is that I need to include a publication policy because, in this time, an article submitted was published in another zine. This looks bad, so please see the policy at the end of the zine.

And contribute!

CONTRIBUTOR INFO

One of the things I ask each contributor to provide is a little bio about them. These go onto the Notes on a Napkin website, and are published in the zine. Wouldn't be much point without that, would there?

Not everyone who contributed to this issue provided one. In one case, that was my fault - as I mentioned in the extended Editorial I was in hospital or in bed so I didn't get the chance to ask. Thankfully the author is going to write a couple more parts to his series.

And, in the couple of weeks between my dad dying and the funeral, I must have deleted the other bio provided! Huge apologies for that one!

So, here is the bio I got and managed *not* to delete from my emails. Mine is already on the site and I don't see a reason to write another for here. I'll get back to the other contributors and ask them to provide a bio that I can put on the website in the future.

Many thanks to the contributors for the first issue!

Lauren Lloyd

Play Diplomacy's Pootleflump (aka Lauren Lloyd) lives on the beautiful Ayrshire coast, overlooking the Isle of Arran. She masquerades as a full-time doctor, part-time writer, breeder of talking geese, cake-lover and diplomacy player. In reality, she is descended from Scottish Selkie. Famed for their ability firstly to transform from seals into pint-drinking young women (and back again). Secondly to charm anyone into accepting a convoy across the seas to the Faerie Realm.
www.lauren-lloyd.com



Others

Richard Solensky, Hugh Polley, and Oxmeister.

PUBLICATION POLICY

1. If you wish to contribute any material to **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** the item should be sent to diplomaticonpublishing@gmail.com using the items process described on the **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** website [here](#).
2. If an item is sent to the publisher, the publisher has the right to publish the item unless the contributor has formally withdrawn the article by the deadline date. The deadline date will be published on the **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** website.
3. No item submitted is guaranteed to be published. If the publisher decides to not publish an article the contributor will be notified. If the publisher decides to hold back publication of an article until a later issue of **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** the contributor will be notified.
4. The publisher reserves the right to edit, or request the contributor to edit, items provided, for quality and consistency.
 - (a) If the publisher accepts the item for publication, the item may be edited without reference to the contributor.
 - (b) If the publisher requests that the contributor edits the item themselves, the contributor may decide to withdraw the article.
5. The contributor may self-publish any item submitted for publication to **NOTES ON A NAPKIN**.
6. The contributor should *not* send an item for publication to any other organisation or publication until after the next publication deadline or any future publication deadline unless the contributor withdraws the submitted item.
7. If an item submitted for publication is published elsewhere, other than self-published, in contravention of (6) above, the publisher of **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** will not publish that item in **NOTES ON A NAPKIN**.

This policy will be in place for all future issues of **NOTES ON A NAPKIN** from issue 2 and thereafter and is subject to change at any time.

I've put this policy in place because an article that I had agreed to publish this issue was subsequently published in another zine. This *may* have happened due to the delay in publishing **NOAN** #1. As I had committed to publishing already, I included it. It looks bad, though, and I'm not prepared to do that again.