

The Diplomacy Survival Guide

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So you've played Diplomacy for a while, and have done moderately well, winning some games, drawing more, and losing even more, and you ask yourself, what do I have to do to take my play to the next level? Well, the answer my friends, is in this column. Simply read it, and heed my advice! This is good stuff! Trust me...I wouldn't lie to you just to win a few more games, now *would* I?

Well, as an initial installment of the Diplomacy Survival Guide, I thought I would give you the Ten Rules for Surviving at Diplomacy. Well, ok, maybe not **the** Ten Rules, but the *first* ten. Oh, and before someone sues me for false representation, these are the ten rules for *surviving*. I never said anything about winning, right?

- **Paranoia is a good thing.**

Do you ever get that creepy feeling when playing Diplomacy that everyone else is out to get you? Do you ever suffer from delusions and irrational fears? Well, relax. Those fears are perfectly rational -- everyone **is** out to get you.

- **Too much of a good thing is bad.**

Although a healthy dose of paranoia is good for you, you have to learn to put it aside somewhat. After all, maybe you can get some of the others before they get you, right? Maybe you can be friends with someone and beat up on the others, then finish your friend off before he gets you? Then again, maybe not. The point is if you *don't* trust **one** of the six other scheming bastards (yes, you are one too), then you won't get anywhere.

- **Security in numbers...or, let's all beat up on Russia!**

If you organize an alliance which will take on another country, then there are a few advantages that will follow. First, while you're all attacking that other country, you're not getting attacked yourself. Second, you are in reduced danger of a stab, since if one of the countries in an alliance stabs another, then there is a greater chance of the other members in the alliance coming to the rescue. This is because that makes people feel good, and even though we're all backstabbers, we don't like to admit it. Third, you have more friends that won't be *expecting* you to stab, because of my second point, so if you stab, it'll be a real surprise. Finally, you get to grow and have more units, thus the security in numbers (you didn't think I meant the number of countries in your alliance, did you?).

- **Talk to everyone.**

Ask them about the weather, their national football team, whether they've ever tried lasagna and would like to meet in this nice little restaurant in Rome that you know to try it out (especially if you're Austria talking to France). Even if you're not going to ally with someone right away, it's always a good thing to keep the channels of communication open. That way you can get an early warning of a stab from someone else, or, even better, spread disinformation when you're about to stab someone! It's also easier to start working with someone late in a game if you've talked with them earlier.

- **Don't stop talking.**

Even if you've stabbed someone, or if they've stabbed you, don't end the communication. If nothing else, you need to either gloat and rub it in or swear and vent your anger (as the case may be) to get the most out of the game! More than that, though, if you've been stabbed, you may induce a guilt trip in the stabber and convince him to call off the attack (or see something better which the two of you could attack together). Then you can get your revenge in a few years....

And if *you* stab someone, you may *let* yourself be convinced to recant -- thus letting your victim get even more out of position, and getting the chance to stab that player twice in a row! It may also be worthwhile to let him live as a puppet state for a few turns and use his support against others before finishing him off (remember he'll likely be looking for revenge!).

- **Brains are deadly...or, if you're smart, don't show it!**

Someone who seems to know a lot, and talks about all sorts of openings and proposes brilliant plans that look 5 years into the future will probably get clobbered immediately by the other players because they'll recognize that he's too dangerous (call it instinct). Therefore, make a few spelling and grammar errors, propose a plan with an obvious mistake, or ask someone what a Lepanto is or what the correct syntax for a convoy is. They will then think you are harmless (or at least sufficiently so), and will have a tendency to ally with you early in the game, since they'll think themselves able to take advantage of you later on.

- **The early worm gets caught -- by the early bird.**

When starting a game, don't decide too early on who your allies will be and what your strategy is. Speak to everyone first, getting an idea of who the players are and who the fools are. Then make standard opening moves in the Spring and decide who to attack in the Fall or the Spring of the following year. The worst way to start off a game is to attack someone right off the bat and have someone else attack you.

- **One enemy is good. Three enemies is bad.**

If you seem to be friendly and allied with everyone, your neighbours will all start to get suspicious, since they'll be expecting a stab, and it'll be harder for you to work with anyone. You may even provoke one of them to attack you -- which could happen at the same time as you attack someone else, and really spoil your situation. Therefore, try having an enemy at all times; someone weaker and smaller than you, of course!

- **Brush up on your opening moves and best alliance statistics.**

The Hall of Fame will give you a breakdown of which alliances win the most and which countries are the best. You can also get a list of opening moves and discussions about which win the most often and which are the most effective, etc.

Well, not all alliances are created equal, and they usually tend to favor one side over the other. Here is my view of the best primary ally for each country, as well as the best secondary ally (you shouldn't just have one ally, but at least two, so that you can stab one and still keep the other). I would say more, but that would be another article (Manus, do I hear you calling?).

- **Austria:** Italy, Russia.
- **England:** Germany, Turkey
- **France:** England, Russia
- **Germany:** Italy, France
- **Italy:** Turkey, Germany
- **Russia:** England, Italy
- **Turkey:** Russia, France

- **Play England.**

This is the easiest one to follow - Turkey being a good second choice if you can survive the first few years. I've actually never been eliminated in a standard Diplomacy game when playing England. Unfortunately, I've never won either -- but that's not the point, right?

The fact is, England is the most defensive country there is, because it has a natural moat surrounding it. There's not even a drawbridge to be lowered to let the troops in once the castle wall is breached. Unfortunately, this same obstacle also makes it hard for England to get her armies out onto the continent.

And here's a final, bonus tip...

- **Reaching 18 centers helps.**

You'll definitely survive if you reach 18 centers. I guarantee it! (Standard games only -- yes, there's always a catch.)

Well, I hope this will be of use to you. I really recommend that you change your goal to survival from winning. After, with the likes of Dan Shoham out there, you don't even stand a chance, right? Just let me know which games you'll be playing in!

[The Diplomatic Pouch #1, Spring 1995M.](#)