

**Vaniver, Formless void beyond time and space-** 11/13/10: I'm excited. It's been years since I've played Diplomacy, and the thing that I love about it is already capturing me: the nearly endless possibilities.

Diplomacy can't be solved. There may be a limited number of options- each person has ~4 strong strategies to pick from- but which strategy to adopt depends entirely on what other people do, and what you think other people will do. It's been a while since I played Diplomacy with strangers, and I've never played Diplomacy by post (or its electronic equivalent) before. The parameters are entirely different: no reading faces, no eavesdropping on conversations, no watching who is talking to who, no enforceable contracts about mutual silence. I don't have any data on whether or not that'll improve my ability to trust effectively: I might have been judging by appearance too much previously, and now that possibly counterproductive signal is silenced. (I've seen a lot of honest faces, they usually come attached to liars, and all that.)

There don't seem to be all that many cheatish things to do. The main thing I'm contemplating is ccing people on orders to Yvain, and then sending Yvain different orders with the instructions to disregard the others. I need to get a ruling on whether that'll work early on, hopefully in such a way that it doesn't tip my hand. [Edit- Yvain suggested this, making it less attractive. I still did it several times.] The other option is forwarding people doctored emails; we'll see if that ever becomes valuable.

My roiling thoughts are focused on strategy and presentation. The second is more important- I don't even know what country I'm playing yet!- but also less exciting. It looks like most people use email, though one has suggested skype. That seems like a useful way to get an ally- if I'm a face and other people are a name, then I have an emotional edge, but that's also a double-edged sword (if I want trust specifically to have the option of betrayal, others will probably have similar motives). I project being verbose and in character, but that could go both ways- it's nice to be a fixture of the game, but that also can bite you in the ass. Being too friendly is as dangerous as not being friendly enough.

I project this group will respond well to full arguments: "look, here are your four options, this one is superior"- but historically trying to play other people's turns for them is a way to get a fearsome reputation (though this is primarily in Risk (bleh) and other games, not diplo), which you **do not want** if you need other people to cooperate with you.

I think a newspaper email to everyone, along with private letters, seems like a good plan. I'm not sure what I could put in the newspaper, though, besides reporting on events (emphasizing things I want to emphasize?) and editorials (my opinions? Opinions I disavow myself from? Dueling opinions?).

Link about balance: [http://www.diplom.org/Zine/S2002M/VonPowell/1900\\_Intro.html](http://www.diplom.org/Zine/S2002M/VonPowell/1900_Intro.html) Come on Russia or France!

**Constantinople, Spring 1901-** 11/14/2010 6PM : I sip my coffee, looking at the dossier. Storm clouds are gathering over Europe, and the Empire's holdings to the West are in disarray. Austria-Hungary and Russia, the vultures, will probably seek to feast on as much as they can. Infidels.

But, I muse, it could be worse. I could be Austria-Hungary. The first plan is to write a friendly letter to everyone; state my desire for peaceful expansion and mutual health; talk about the Young Turk newspaper? I could just write the inaugural issue and send it off with an "unsubscribe" suggestion.

It seems best to put early planning in the initial letter, to personalize them.

9PM: Did I really just spend 3 hours writing letters? I suppose I must have. Regardless, six letters sent out. The interesting thing about this stage is that nothing is a lie, yet- all of the plans I suggested are genuine- generally, of the strategies I would have played if I were them, the one that doesn't go against Turkey. They might contradict one another on the whole, but which one is real remains yet to be seen.

Turkey is a hard country to play. You have to be patient, you have to be diplomatically plugged in, and you have to play a very delicate dance with your neighbors. Turkey is a difficult nut to crack, but not terribly difficult- you cannot win Diplomacy by playing the map instead of the players.

So, what do I know about the other players? At this point not much. None of them have seen fit to contact me yet- scratch that, just got a response! France is interested in sharing information, but doesn't have any yet.

It'll be interesting to see how these information networks develop- even if I know the lies Germany is telling to everyone else, does that really help me determine what the truth is? There might be recognizable patterns- but it's not clear to me that's the case. The potential for misinformation is great- but only if you have a reputation for having reliable information. If I want to stymie expansion on the other half of the board, doing it by telling people what their opponents have told me seems like something that'll only work once or twice.

I might be fixating on Jack because of the skype thing- but he's Britain, which means we're a solid pair for nudging things in each other's direction. We won't be in direct competition until lategame, and we each benefit from having our neighbors be weaker. The main challenge will be what happens with Russia- if he turns on England, I may be in a rough spot. If both England and I turn on Russia, we will be butting heads.

11:30PM: Response from Russia. Doesn't want to bounce in the Black Sea. This is very bothersome, but it seems useful to dig to the depths of why.

The main reason is that I've already told people that I'm moving there. At this point, I think my credibility is more valuable than Russia as a potential ally. The secondary reason is that while I could tell people "hey, Russia is more reasonable than I thought, changing my mind," that sets me up for a giant status loss if I get backstabbed and if I don't it telegraphs to the world that we're allied. The tertiary reason is tradition: there's not much justification beyond what was in the first two reasons, but it's like asking for a prenup- initiating it is a minor trust loss, but refusing it is a massive trust loss. Any plans he has that are put on hold by bouncing in the Black Sea are not plans I want to see come to fruition.

11/15/2010 12:30AM: France and Italy have agreed Piedmont will be a DMZ. Bothersome. I hope it is a trap for France. If Italy does go West, he has little to lose from international opprobrium, whereas

France has quite a bit to lose. But it strongly suggests I should be more worried about Italy and the West than I am at the moment.

11/15/2010 11AM: Response from Italy: (OOC: I'll send a proper reply later. Suffice to say for now that I'm not exactly being fully honest with the public at the moment, and I see your point)

I cackled out loud. I am enjoying this quite a bit. Of course, it is exactly what I want to hear, so I can't believe it until the fall.

I had time to read the rest of the emails, but not to process them- I've got a lot of non-game work on my plate that I really ought to do first.

Britain's email feels crafty in the extreme. "France is pondering a DMZ, what should I do?" I can either respond honestly- "the best move is to agree and move in" or appear stupider- "oh, I'd agree and respect it!", and the primary effect will probably be how he sees me, not how he makes his decision. It seems that if we are to become Weird Sisters, we must believe in the craft of each other, and thus I should be honest and wicked.

11/17/2010 11:30 AM: Austria has sent me a letter asking for an alliance until 1904. Hm.

I cannot imagine a scenario in which it is good to decline this offer, thus I am drafting a grateful response accepting it. Then will come the question of deciding whether or not to act on it.

Response sent, and I informed Russia "hey, I'm allying with AH, don't worry it's a trap."

I think which alliance will be real will depend on what happens in 1901. One of the odd things about this game is that you want your ally to be weak, in some ways- if I ally with AH, odds are I can turn on them later and win. If I ally with Russia, odds are I can't turn on them later and win- unless they're softened up by strong resistance from Germany and England. So, even if the board position is such that I could get great short-term gains by turning on AH, I may be better off long-term if I turn on Russia.

While it's tempting to want to give Russia a Morton's Fork (give me Sev and turn west, and I will as well; resist, and I'll ruin you), that doesn't make for a good ally. I have a stronger impression of Austria's ability as a player, and have a far greater commitment from him than from Russia. Am I thinking of sticking with Russia because I'm attaching mystical significance to the Steamroller, or because I thought of allying with him first? I think part of my issue is I don't see where to go besides West once I hit Sevastopol. I suppose taking Russia is doable, and then I'm a Steamroller by myself- but if Russia is ailing, Germany and England will take a bite of that pie. I don't particularly want to get into a fight with Germany- but I suppose with Austria on my side, it'll be doable.

**Constantinople, Fall 1901-** 11/19/2010 12:30 PM: The position is such that I could be guaranteed Rumania in the fall, but only if Austria risks Vienna and Greece. I cannot imagine why they would agree to such a plan (unless they're really scared by Russia), and so it seems unlikely that it will happen. I could ensure Austria gets Greece, at the cost of Russia getting Rumania. I could most likely get Serbia and Bulgaria with Italian cooperation.

France is in a terrible position, which I am glad to see. I don't know how England and Germany will react- I'll probably send them a letter or two making suggestions- but it seems to me that the most likely outcome in the near future is a strong Italy and a strong Germany. A strong Italy is worrying, because AH and I are on the chopping block if that happens. AH is going to have at most 4 dots, though- is that really good enough to be ally material?

Oh. I just thought of something. If I convince Italy that I'm supporting AH into Greece, then I don't need to actually do it- AH will get Greece, I'll get Serbia and Bulgaria, and I'll convince Russia that I'm stabbing AH. That's brilliant- my only fear is it's too brilliant to work.

4:30 PM: What do I believe? Austria's last comment, from Spring, suggests he's scared. Italy has said nothing to me besides "I see your point," and I don't want to approach him without hearing back from Austria first. He is poised to move Eastward, and it seems to be wishful thinking that he is moving North instead of East. Austria might be lying about Italy to keep me scared and not working with Russia. Russia has done nothing to reassure me of his goodwill. However, Russia agreeing to the bounce means that I'm much safer in the short-term, since I don't have to worry about Rumania. That he only did this once I publicly allied with Austria suggests he thinks he's being played.

I think I have great short-term board position- I will definitely have four, and possibly five, centres in 1902. I probably can enter the Black Sea without Russian opposition, or have my fleet in Constantinople ready to swing south. Long-term, my position is much more suspect; I'm dependant on an uncertain alliance with a growing power, or a more certain alliance with a shrinking power. 4+5 vs 4+5 isn't pretty. 4+5+5 vs 4 is better, but if Russia, Italy and I gobble up Austria isn't not clear that it'll be Italy on the block next instead of me. I'm confident in my ability to hold out until Germany is causing problems for Russia- but whether I'll still be a major player by then is uncertain.

It looks like I need to play a short-term game alienating as few people as possible, and then react to whatever the wider world reveals. I wish I could get a better read of Russia.

11/20/2010 12:30PM: Austria seems to be playing this game straight- no lies, no betrayals. I, of course, complimented him on that- the two laws for a diplomat are never stop thinking of yourself, and compliment everything. Or, at least, he's putting up a very convincing front to that effect. One of the interesting things about email diplomacy games is it's possible to share conversations verbatim, and pick up on significant clues. Russia has told Austria he plans to declare war on me by creating a second fleet, which if he does is great for us tactically- we'll be able to destroy him. Me going into Serbia is also great because it makes it somewhat harder for Austria to stab me in 1902.

The best thing is if Italy is bounced out of Vienna so the Austrian army stays in Galicia. I consider this unlikely- Italy must know that Austria intends to pull back- and sending an email saying "hey, I convinced Austria to help me out, now is the opportune time to stab him" smells too false to me. Is it worth ruining my credibility with Italy for a small chance to move a single piece a single spot, when that isn't necessary to win? Doubtful.

My orders are in- I only wrote off to England and Germany once, and so far it doesn't look like they've taken my advice. I wrote to them again, telling them about the impending fall of Russia, and suggesting we divide it- that may be a foolish long-term move but I think it will help. I can't imagine England not going for St. Petersburg when it became clear Russia was faltering unless they're just not paying attention, and this will make it harder for them to not pay attention.

**Constantinople, Winter 1901- 11/22/2010 1PM:** Honestly, I don't know what to say. I'm sort of aghast at how the rest of Europe looks. It didn't even cross my mind that Germany would let Russia into Sweden, or that England wouldn't take Norway. It's just so obviously the correct move.

And so now Russia is a monstrous 6. Germany is 5, as am I, and Italy is thankfully a pitiful 3. I sent an email off to Russia explaining the situation, he responded about as expected, and so I sent another email explaining further.

I'm not sure what he'll do here. I think I, as a wolf (so much politer than snake), would be drawn to another wolf- but he will probably see me as all the more dangerous because of it. And so we will learn how he reacts to danger- by seeking to squash it, or by seeking to use it.

I am pretty confident Austria will help me into Rumania in the Spring. Beyond that, all I need is for him to tap the Ukraine in the Fall and Sevastopol is mine- but for him to be able and willing to tap the Ukraine, Italy and Russia can't be too rough on him.

I wonder about my build orders- I have the option of targeting Russia, Austria, or Italy. Fleet Con is the constant, and then there's either in Ank (anti-Russia), army in Smy (anti-Russia and Austria, but easy to disguise for either), or fleet in Smy (anti-Italy). Italy seems pretty damn anemic, but if I want Tunis I ought to get that second fleet (and hope Italy moves to the Adriatic). I need that army in Armenia to force Sevastopol, but being able to swing west with it is nice. Army Smy it is.

4PM: I suppose I should write Austria, to keep him in the loop. Britain asked me for an update, and I told him little- I feel somewhat bad that I have so few rumors to pass, but telling him something like "oh, I'm choosing between my secret allies" seems definitely counterproductive.

8:18PM: Well, that's it. War with Russia. I've been planning for this since day 1, (check; nope. While I've been making plans with Austria about that, I had been hoping it wouldn't happen, and that hope gradually eroded). Fine, diary. Be unchanging. I was going to say this was emotionally problematic, and it is. Russia is in a much better position than I would have imagined he could be in. Italy is in a worse one- but Albania still is bothersome, and I'm relying pretty heavily on Austria worrying more about the Russia threatening me than the Italy threatening him, which is unlikely. If Russia brings German allies into the equation... I don't even want to imagine such a thing.

I'm considering offering Austria the complete correspondence between myself and Russia. It seems like the offer is a trust-increasing move, but the follow-through might not be. There's a point where "I'm lying!" is less convincing than the letters written. I can tell him that I was planning on being a terrible ally for Russia- which is true- but I can't tell him that both sets of letters were earnest. I don't think I left any

evidence in them that they contradict each other. Me telling Russia that I'm in a secret alliance with Austria is pretty damaging- and so there's a risk management question. Generally, it's better to own up to something than to be exposed- and so I think I ought to offer it.

11/24/10 3:00 PM: I'm amazed at how the emotional involvement in Diplomacy changes for a postal game. I've spent more time writing letters than it would take to play a single game to completion in person. The suspense is troublesome.

Austria and I continue our tactical discussion. Germany asked for some of my correspondence with Russia, and I forwarded him two letters, chosen to flatter me most, obviously. Austria was uninterested in the correspondence. Looking at the email counts (to and from me), I have: 32 Austria, 18 Russia, 13 UK, 6 Germany, 5 France, 2 Italy.

I have the vague feeling I should be writing more letters- but to who? About what? I want Italy to die, and even if I do turn against Austria that won't be a good idea until years down the line. France is uninteresting- though I could offer him moral support- and all I have to offer people in the Northwest is tactical advice which I doubt they would take. Britain might now, after seeing how much better off he would have been, but stubborn once is stubborn twice.

**Constantinople, Spring 1202-** 11/26/2010 7PM: I just laughed for a minute straight. I don't think I was this emotionally boosted by getting into grad school- which isn't that surprising as I wasn't this tense about grad school. Austria's letter to me began with "To the wisest defender of humanity, the beacon of intelligence and honesty, the most praised Grand Vizier of Ottoman empire, which may last thousand years."

What happened? Russia is tactically inept, and I strongly suspect Italy is as well. We crushed his army in Albania, and Austria will be able to bounce him out of Greece. Trieste and Vienna are safe. Russia was bounced out of Galicia, Rumania is mine, and Armenia is mine. Next spring we seize Galicia, then next fall we seize Sevastopol.

Actually, I'm not sure Russia knows how to support. I should try for Sevastopol now. The pro-Austria thing to do would be to go Rum->Sev and Ser->Rum, the anti-Austria thing would be Arm->Sev. Time to read all of Austria's letter. It's just a short congratulation and "ok, what now?"

Which is, actually, a good question. If Italy is an idiot, he will bounce Austria out of Greece. If he is cleverer, he'll finally take Tunis, and have two builds. It would be a terrible move to not build F Nap, but then I would move to Tyrolia to build an army in Venice too. Unless he can be convinced to move West, in which case Ven-Pie and F Rom and F Nap would be solid.

I don't think Italy can be convinced to go West. I think the most we can get out of him is to die quickly. Similarly, even though I could tell Russia "look, I'm taking Sev with a fleet, you're not threatened, now go West" I don't think that would be better than simply taking Russia and going west. If I take St. Petersburg, I've crossed the Stalemate Line, and I don't think England or Germany would stop me.

So, as it is a fall turn my thoughts turn to treachery. If I can convince Austria to move Bud-Gal, I can move Ser-Bud. I would be up to 7, he would be down to 3, but then I would be friendless in a hostile corner. He and Russia working together would be hard to counteract. Austria, were he to stab me, could take Ser and help Russia take Rum. Bothersome, and possibly lethal. I don't think that would particularly help Austria, though- it would take him and Russia a long time to destroy me, probably longer than it will take England and Germany to take down France, and that would hamper his long-term prospects.

To any readers shocked by me contemplating treachery at the celebration of a great victory- I find it wise to make my prior probability of treachery the benefit the other person gets from betraying me, and then use agreements as evidence to come up with the posterior. It does put you on edge- you go "oh, Austria *is* holding my life in his hands, despite me being stronger than him"- but that is not something you should ever forget in this game.

I actually don't have much mid or late game experience with Diplomacy. Most of the games I've played have been subject to human fatigue- and so we're much more likely to call it and say "well, Turkey's highest at 9, he wins" in 1904. The only real advice I have is "cross the Stalemate Lines" and "don't sit and wait while others grow."

Both of those suggest I should take St. Petersburg before I turn my armies on Austria, and that seems a solid plan.

10:30PM: These letters are proving difficult to write. The next turn is easy to plan but beyond that is opaque. I see an unlikely trick that could plant me in Moscow. I see open warfare ending in failure until someone enters Silesia.

11/27/2010 12:30AM: Finally sent off the letters. (I haven't spent the last 6 hours on them, but I have spent much of that time thinking about them.) Came up with four approaches for each country, sent them off to Austria for comment. My favorites are getting Germany to move to Tyrolia and trying to trick Russia out of Moscow.

I'm suspicious of the second plan, though. It seems too cute, and too reliant on Russia making mistakes he hasn't made before. Russia's mistake has been playing offense when he should be playing defense and not using supports (which is *serious* tactical ineptitude). This triggers the first but not the second- it relies on him using the orders I give him as written and not seeing the stab coming.

10:30AM: Austria responded with a sensible, slow plan. I will stay at 5, Austria will grow to 5. We probably take Sev in the fall of next year. He's right; we don't need to rush, and we already have about as many troops as will fit on the front lines. But it still rankles to throttle our growth.

**Constantinople, Winter 1902-** 11/28/2010 2:30PM: Yeesh. Russia and Germany are almost definitely allied, and it looks like they're going to try to crack Austria like a nut. Austria got one build- an army- but Russia has one as well, and Italy has two. The tides do appear to have turned, somewhat.

**Constantinople, Fall 1903-** 12/1/2010 4PM: I really need to get my sleep schedule back on track. (Hopefully this game will wrap up before I try the uberman.) I appear to have missed much of the fun

discussions- Austria has convinced Germany to turn on Russia, and so Moscow will be mine rather soon. Once Russia and Italy are reduced/destroyed, then Austria, Germany, and I will make our choices- and the natural one is Germany and myself against Austria.

So things are looking good. But, as it is a fall turn, my thoughts turn to treachery. It is unlikely but *possible* that I could take three of Austria's dots this turn. That plan depends on him taking Venice, and so he wouldn't be entirely destroyed, but *man* would that be a reversal. Actually, looking at his orders, there is an alternative plan- I tell Italy how he can take Trieste, I move into Budapest and Greece. Austria is reduced to Vienna and Serbia; I can take Serbia easily enough, and Vienna would probably go to Germany or Italy.

Would that be a better situation? I would be up to 8, and 9 by the end of the next year. I would be a public traitor of a known alliance. I would have no guarantees of support from Italy, Germany, or Russia, and know that combined they could take me out. But it seems like their relationships are not very strong- Italy would be in a position to move North, Russia in a position to move West. It would take me at least a year to recover from growing explosively, but then would be trapped- myself and Germany against Russia would be a hard sell for a Germany whose ally I betrayed so that he could be attacked by Italy.

8:30PM: After being busy with other things, I finally come back to thinking about Diplomacy. I think I'm better off sticking with Austria until I hit St. Petersburg, like planned a while ago. I expect our front to always be heavily guarded on my end and terribly guarded on his, and so strangling a goose before it has finished laying eggs is a terrible plan.

Test of my predictive ability: Germany will play Kie-Ber, Ruh-Mun, Boh S Ruh-Mun.

**Constantinople, Fall 1904-** 12/8/2010 5PM: Back from vacation! Not much interesting happened while I was away- the same roller coaster of mania versus depression about the future. This turn, though, things are finally heating up- unless Italy and England bounce each other, it looks like France will be reduced to Liverpool by the end of the year. Now would be the perfect time for Germany to move into Sweden and Belgium, putting him up at 8, but he might be more patient than that.

Similarly, I could turn on Austria for the same effect. The same problems remain- my position afterwards would be precarious, Austria+Russia could do me serious harm, and I'd only get 2 provinces. I almost want to do it just to make this game more stabby- so far, as far as I can tell, only France has been betrayed- but I really don't see it being effective in the long term.

6PM: Offered Germany a plan guaranteed to crush France. And cautioned England against that very plan. We'll see what happens.

12/10/2010 11AM: Things between Austria and Germany are heating up. Offered Germany support against Austria if he moves against Russia. It seems likely he would try to pull the same trick- "look, I'm invading with these units!" then "oops I supported your enemies, how about that." But that should still be at least one less unit he can effectively use against us- unless he, say, moves into Silesia and Russia



moves south into Bohemia. More likely, it'll be made clear that, nope, Germany *wasn't* on our side, just that it wasn't interested in fighting two fronts at once.

I really don't like that I just spent this whole year defending up north.

**Constantinople, Fall 1905**- 12/15/2010 4:15PM: Hm, it's been a week since I wrote a diary entry. Really, not all that much going on. Talked with both England and Germany about my hope for the endgame- get rid of Italy and Russia, then the corners conquer inward (although to Germany it was "we'll eat Austria"). England is still in the dominant position, Germany is still not going after Russia, Italy is still taking up space, Austria is still a faithful ally able to defend almost all of his provinces. I don't recall games getting this boring. I don't think Diplomacy works as a game if it's full of honest people- people make alliances and then just do tactics until they win or hit a stalemate. When you're playing with snakes, you actually have to stay on your toes- but I would bet real money at 100-1 odds that I won't be betrayed by Austria before I betray him (assuming both of us play ignorant of the bet). He doesn't have the position to, and he definitely doesn't have the reason to. Likewise, England could get 2 dots by stabbing Germany, but why? That's exactly the position I'm in. He doesn't rely on Germany for defense the way I rely on Austria, but the choice between "grow as part of the dominant alliance" and "move from dominant alliance to dominant single player" is a no-brainer. The odds are low Germany will decide "ok, up to 10, I should fortify my back so England doesn't stab me for a solo win." His back is simply too large to fortify. And so England is probably facing almost the same incentives I am- slightly weaker, because his defensive position is better- and so there's really not much playing left to do in the game. E+G will take I, then A, then R or T, then one of them will have hit 18 or they'll draw. The rest of us are essentially playing for the chance at a draw (which they would only take because of boredom) or the hope that England will turn on Germany before we die, in which case we can either hope for a draw (or just a loss, since England will probably only do that to hit 18).

12/16/2010 6:30 AM: So, it seems both Austria and I see ourselves drowning and clinging to a single shred of hope- mine was that England and I turn on Germany and Austria, and his is that everyone but England+Germany will have a chance of beating England+Germany. And that is true- we will have a chance. It's even better than the chance I would have of getting England to accept a draw rather than shoot for 18. I think the things I dislike about are that it relegates me to the back corner- I can only poke with a few fleets, or possibly convoy armies at serious risk to the homeland- and it requires moving backward; I have to give up Sevastopol to convince Russia. Russia is anemic- I expect that England and Germany were planning to crush him anyway, and I don't think he can resist them very effectively. But I will give Austria his fighting chance, and even if we go down I'll be able to stab him and Russia in the back and get my third place without a prize.

12/23/2010 12:30 PM Again, another week between entries. Things continue to move somewhat slowly- Italy resigned, making the battle in the south a lot more predictable, and Russia is about to crumple like a tin can. Austria and I will have a stalemate fortress, and possibly enough push to expand in the north. I sent Germany Russia's plans for this year to coordinate the crushing, and got back an offer for a 3-way split of England, Germany, and myself once Russia is defeated.

It seems that Austria and I are in a kingmaker position of sorts- we can just sit behind the stalemate lines and say "you know what, we're only interested in a three-way split. Have fun determining which of you is included!" Giving that up- as well as the safety of the stalemate- seems like a poor decision. Part of me is desperate for the thrill of backstabbing, but that part of me is much smaller than the part of me that wants to maximize my winnings.

**Constantinople, Winter 1906** - 12/28/2010 1:49 AM: So, I'm faced with something of a tough decision. We're down to 4, and it's the 4 I've been expecting for a while. They have 18, we have 16. They've crossed the 17-17 stalemate lines, but we've got a strong 14 center fortress. Pretty much the only growth available to us is to take Munich, which is on our side of the 17-17 stalemate line.

Wrote Austria and England. Almost finished a letter to Germany spelling out why he's about to die when I realized that that was totally stupid. All I would do is make him a passionate advocate for a draw now, which is totally the wrong plan. Cutting it out of my email, pasting it here (because I wrote it, and so I might as well preserve it!)

However, I think the two of us have reached a point where deception is no longer necessary. There are two possible paths forward: the first is that the four powers of Europe swear off warfare forever, as the War to End All Wars has been kind to each of us and there is little to be gained by pitting our massive empires against one another. The second is that Britain, greedy and tired of your alliance, turns on you and you are crushed by him and Austria. I see no reason to expect that if I turn on Austria that I will be included in a three way draw; it would be too tempting to scour me from the continent or for Britain to backstab you and reach 18 by himself. I also see no reason for you or Austria to turn on your former partners- that path is fraught with peril and unlikely to succeed. And so the only option anyone can take to increase their expected winnings above .25 is Britain deciding to backstab you. Ironically, it is the weakness of our positions that leaves Austria and myself safe- we are strong enough to hold the line against you and England, but not strong enough to survive without each other, and not strong enough to threaten Britain if he turns against you. And so even though it is possible that you could take Warsaw and Moscow before I can reinforce them, it is unlikely that you or Britain could transfer 18 provinces to a single power without Austria and myself breaking out. There is no growth for your alliance beyond 20 provinces, and 2 is a very low margin.

So, I think I'll send him a standard "yeah, ok."

**Constantinople, Fall 1908**- 1/9/2011 10:00 AM: Been a long time since my last entry. Things have been fairly slow- just a bunch of defending- until now, as Britain just stabbed Germany. Austria wants to ally with Germany against Britain, Germany wants to have revenge on Britain, Britain wants me to betray Austria before Germany falls.

What do I want? I want the game to have as few people as possible at the end with me included. The

most likely path to that seems to be a 17-17 split with England, or possibly Germany. Getting up to 18 seems unlikely but possible.

What do I expect? Germany looks like it will hit 4 units at the end of this turn, still holding Kie, Ber, Mun, and Hol (or Den). Britain will be at 11 if I take StP from him. I will be at 11 if I take Rom. Austria will be at 6 if I take Rom and 7 if no exchange happens or I take Rom and he takes War. If I fully betray Austria, he will be down to 4 and I will be up to 13.

It seems tempting to betray Austria, and then I'll get the Austrian territory and Britain will get the German territory and we'll be at 17-17. But then he can take StP and I lose. If I manage to take all of Austria and one piece of Germany before Britain takes all of Germany, then I win. The distribution of armies is about to shift massively- I ought to get out my board and look at this.

I am unconfident that a race is in my favor. England will have sufficient units to hold the line in Scandinavia for a few turns, and can crack StP if he devotes a year or two to it. Germany has a better defensive position than Austria, as he's clustered in his remaining centers, and Austria is clustered right past them. I think I can fold up Austria faster than England can fold up Germany, but worry about England taking part of Italy. Actually, if I can convince England to give up Tunis as a condition for my alliance... hmmm. I don't think he'll agree, as he should be able to see that'll end in his death. But if he doesn't know I'm going for StP, then he might- but that plan counts on everything going well in Africa, and he could easily take it back before I'm secure.

I think odds are greater than 1/3rd I can win the race if I betray now. I think those odds decline with time, as Britain will have a head start. I essentially choose whether Britain and I are even, or whether I have more. I think it's almost certain I'll be involved in whatever 3-way split occurs if I go that way, but unlikely that I can pull off a 2-way split with Britain. So, the question is- am I risk-averse or risk-loving when it comes to karma? I think I'm risk-loving, as the reputation gains for being a sole winner are more than n times the reputation gains for participating in an n-way draw. Time to betray.

Looking at this again, I'm back to pessimistic on winning the race. I'm counting on Britain screwing up somewhere, as he should be able to take Munich in a year unless Germany focuses on preventing that.

The main issue is that I can't guarantee that I'll extract anything from Britain if I betray this turn, and I need one thing (well, 2 if you count StP) from him to have a chance. I suppose a better way to look at this is- if I wait, does that increase my chances that Britain will make it into Austria? He currently has 4 armies on the board- the main risk I run is the army in Marseilles making it into Venice, him taking back StP (which would just mean a draw if I hold Tunis), and that's it. So I think one more year, and then I betray.

But that plan has me antsy because of the prospect of an Austrian reversal. I don't think it's ever in his interest to not trust me, though, and so I think I'll be fine there.

So, the Hail Mary play is ION-TUN NAP-ROM APU-NAP AEG-ION. If Britain lets me, I get Tunis. If I keep Tunis, I should win. But I think I'm fixated on this: the odds of pulling it off are low, and if it doesn't work

then I do lose (unless I manage to get Munich). Actually, I might be able to convince Germany to let me into Berlin if that leads to an English defeat. The question is if Austria will have and use the same power, and I think I have to expect that he will. The main loss there would be in Italy; the army in Venice could cause problems.

Bah. This problem is a bit too big; I think I need to sleep on it. At the moment I seem too fixated on the visual of victory and unable to do the math.

1:30 PM: I've slept on it and I don't feel much closer to a conclusion, though I do feel more distant from the issue. The central question seems to be what my utility function looks like here. It is risk-loving but is it risk-loving enough? Winning the race requires 2 of 3 things to go my way, I think, and I think a reasonable estimate that that happens is  $3/8$ ths. Except that seems sort of high- a different path suggests  $1/4$ th is a more palatable estimate (though I might feel that way just because it makes the question ahead of me the one I've been thinking about).

2:30 PM: With further thought I think I've come to a conclusion. By waiting, I only slightly (and perhaps not at all) decrease my chances of winning the race, and increase my chances of not losing. I'll still take StP, and in the Spring I'll be in a position to take four Austrian centers. Swapping Rome and Warsaw actually helps me out, in that regard.

1/14/2011 12:46 AM: I think the length of the game is taking its toll, and I'm not as motivated as I could be. Lots of different things going on- Germany wants to help me into StP to get back at Britain, maybe; Britain is going to move out of Tunis, maybe; Britain and Germany could be doing this as a ruse to get us to give up the fortress; maybe.

I vacillate between dreams of solo victory and a tired acceptance of a third of the win. I'm pretty confident we can force that- but it requires caution and slowness, which seem like they'd cost me a chance at the win. Argh.

5:13 AM: Sent in aggressive orders. I shouldn't lose too much, but I'm not able to make full use of Tunis if I do take it (that'd require risking Rome, which is a giant no).

**Constantinople, Winter 1908**- 10 PM: Things are underway now. Britain behaved exactly as expected, so I could have risked Rome without losing it- and then would have had a solid grasp on Tunis. As is, it's a dance between him and me. My options:

1 Tun / 2 Tys :: 2 Tun / 1 Tys :: 2 Tun / 1 Rom 1 Nap

His options:

1 Tun / 2 Tys :: 2 Tun / 1 Tys

If we play (1,1) or (2,2), nothing changes, which is great for me. If we play (1,2), we move to a situation where he holds Tunis permanently. If we play (2,1), he is able to seize Tunis in the Fall. If we play (3,1) or

(3,2), then it looks like I could go Rom-Tus (if Austria is still cooperating), take Tys, but Tun would have to evac to Ion. I then can get access to Lyon, which looks like it will screw him over.

I'm not sure whether or not I regret the invasion of Tunis. It would have been nice to be clairvoyant, but I'm having a hard time deciding what percentage risk to Rom I was willing to accept. I played as though the answer was 0, which I think I agree with at the moment, but if I had that fleet in Tys my position would be much better now- I would still be angling for Lyon, but be doing it from a secure position rather than a risky one. The main question in the West is whether or not to put effort into acquiring England's orders- and I think the answer there is a no. It looks like 3 is the best bet always.

The North also looks pretty straightforward- StP to Fin, Mos to StP. With German help, might be able to take Norway and/or Sweden.

Austria is the difficult part. I only have 5 pieces to devote to taking it, and 2 of them I'm building now. Add to that his ability to screw things up in Italy, and attacking him without strong British or Germany support seems like a mistake.

I think I can convince Austria to push West, while taking much of Germany for myself and holding him in a vise.

On second thought, if I know England's orders and we push in the Spring, then he won't be taking Tunis on a fall turn, like he would if I played 3. But I have no trustworthy way to get them.

1/17/2011 09:15 Allah curse the day my defaults were set to "reply to all." I just sent a message to Germany saying I thought he was a more pliant ally when denied a chance at victory. This is the second time I've sent a message to an unintended recipient; the first time didn't include anything damaging but this unfortunately does.

I'm not sure whether or not to follow it up with an apology. Apologizing makes it clear I think it's a slight and will likely do little to smooth any feathers I've ruffled, while not apologizing makes it seem like I think he's unimportant enough to discuss in the third person. That analysis suggests I should treat it as a nonevent but man do I feel bad about not apologizing.

Austria remains committed to salvaging Germany, while I continue to push dismantling him for our benefit. I do so halfheartedly, but it's probably clear to Austria that I'm playing for a solo win. Recognizing that doesn't make me feel any different about my strategy- don't play nicely enough to ruin my chances at a backstab, but don't backstab yet- but it seems from the outside that it's a stupid strategy.

1/18/2011 11:20 Ack, been busy with other stuff and now I need to put together my turn. Britain wants to know what Germany is doing, and I have Germany's orders, but I'm not sure whether to lie or tell the truth. It's the old even/odd thinking problem- if I think he thinks I'm lying, I should tell the truth, but if I think he thinks I'm telling the truth, I should lie. The stable response seems to be a mixed strategy- telling Britain "he's going to flip a coin and go to X or Y." Hopefully that'll cause Britain to play cautiously

like I want him to, but I'm not sure what it'll do to my credibility. It's the sort of thing that's really hard to falsify, but also hard to verify.

11:40 Sent in rushed orders. Giving Austria a significant reprieve, as all of my Russian armies are moving North and I'm letting him be in Warsaw temporarily. This may be a terrible decision long-term, since I need to have both that and a sizeable chunk of Germany that currently I'm just leaving on the table / giving to him.

**Constantinople, Winter 1909** 1/21/2011 11:30 Things are interesting. Britain's up to 13, and will be building three this turn- I expect a fleet in Edi and armies in Lvp and Lon. Overall, it looks like the tide is against him this turn- he is likely to lose Mar, Swe, and possibly a third province. But he does still have formidable forces, and it's not clear what the best way to oppose them is. I'm a fan of Bur-Gas, but it wouldn't surprise me if he'll be landing an army in Brest in the fall anyway, and the benefits of him moving back to Spa from Wes are uncertain.

I like the looks of FIN S NWY-SWE, STP-NWY, KIE-DEN as that'll crush his Swedish army. It may lose Kie in the process, but unless we want to tie up the army in the Ruhr that seems inevitable. It seems likely he'll play NTH S SWE-NWY as that counters this.

**Constantinople, Spring 1910** 1/25/2011 6:00 It's so unsettling to tell the truth when you hope they disbelieve you. I'm unsure how much to salt it- what will make him think I'm lying without making him think I want him to think I'm lying? But, the letter is off, and instead of the reassuring flip of a coin matters will be settled by Britain's tortured mind.

**Fall 1910** 1/25/2011 2:25P I'm not sure why I'm still writing "Constantinople," as it's unlikely I'll be forced out at this point. So, Britain believed me, which means no progress in the Mediterranean.

We've got a 4v4 in Scandinavia, and a 3v3 in the Mediterranean. Britain is not setting up to take StP, but it seems likely either Norway or Sweden is going out this turn.

Looking at it, I'm thinking this might be the turn to betray Austria, if I'm going to do it. The main issue is that I think my odds look a lot better if I take Tunis. That will almost definitely require lying to Britain again, and him falling for it this time (that is, him believing me when I want him to, instead of when I don't).

1/27/2011 11:15A I've been busy with work and school, and have had very little time to devote to Diplomacy. Unfortunately, I think that's going to show this turn, as I've put almost no time into talking with other leaders. So, what's my plan?

I have the Austrian orders. They're bland. I could take Rom, Ser, Gre, and Mun, as well as hold Nwy, and have a chance at Tun. I currently have 10, and that would put me up to 15.5. Germany would be down to 2, Austria down to 4, England down to 12.5. The next turn, England could definitely take Nwy, but I don't think they could take StP for another year or so.

Overall... I think I have to go for it. I'm not sure how much of my reasoning here is emotional vs. logical, which gives me pause. On the one hand, I have a significant emotional cost to betraying Austria, and on the other, I have a significant emotional boost to casting the die and attempting a solo victory. I'm not confident enough in my forecasting skills to predict what'll happen, but a naive read of the board suggests I've got  $p > .3$ . The problem is that most of the moves that strengthen me against Austria weaken me against England- taking Rome lets him into Tys, which is bad, neither Serbia nor Munich could be held for all that long, and it would take me a while to bring my troops to bear. It seems like it would take England even longer to hit 18, assuming I take Tunis, and so I might be safe- but Austria's ability to work with England to screw up my defenses is massive.

In the true, one-shot Prisoner's Dilemma, I defect. That's the only rational move. How much does this situation map onto that? Is that a valid comparison? I do actually feel affection towards prase, and I do want to reward him for being a steadfast ally. But even if I include his karma gain into my utility calculation at, say, half, that just means my  $p$  needs to be greater than .5, which I suspect it is. I don't know how violent Austria's demise will be.

I think consistency bias is playing in to this decision. I will look silly when fifteen pages of villainy are released and my actual behavior with regards to Austria is unicorns. At least, I suspect that's the case- I think at most points I made the right decision (though hindsight disagreed a few times), and a villainous justification of unicorns is a worthwhile thing. But when I look at the question of whether or not to pull the trigger, a lot of my resistance is that betraying Austria feels wrong. Probably the best plan to take is tell Austria "hey, I'm going to take Serbia and Greece, and tell England I'm betraying you. The plan is still a three-way draw, but this way you should be able to work with England, get his plans, and screw things up for him." But it's such a venal lie that I don't think Austria would fall for it- there's no benefit to doing anything besides killing Germany if we're shooting for a 3 way draw. Would he fall for it? Well, the probability is higher than a flat stab, so it seems to simply be a better choice. But the emotional cost! I was built for positive-sum games.

I've spent 30 minutes thinking about this. I don't think I'm much closer to a decision than I was before. I've discovered just how deep my reluctance to betray goes, but I haven't come up with any non-emotional arguments against betrayal. The main one is risk aversion- I'm guaranteed 1/3rd if I proceed this way but might lose if I go for a solo (and I'll look even sillier if I give up unicorns for the grave). On the other hand, nothing ventured nothing gained- I'm fairly certain my expected karma gain is higher with betrayal.

One decision-making method is to say "if I flipped a coin and it came up \_\_\_\_, would I be relieved or would I want to flip the coin again?" Since it mentions relief, this works on an emotional level, and so it may not be applicable to my problem (of determining what my utility function actually is, given my emotions). If the coin said "stick with Austria," I would be relieved and do it unhesitatingly. If it said "betray Austria," I would be relieved because the coin was the villain- but I still made the decision to flip the coin. And I would still have the stress of trying to manage a solo victory with an uncertain position.

So... no betrayal, this turn. I'll reexamine in the future, most likely.

**Winter 1910** I need to submit my builds sometime soon. I should also make a decision about what's going to happen with Austria.

He's getting antsy, and I would too in his situation. I haven't been very communicative, and I'm participating in the cannibalization of Germany. I am struck, though, by how counterproductive his alarm and 'suggestion' I only build twice are. I am once again plotting betrayal.

But turning on him now seems like the height of folly. If Britain manages to take a few provinces, then he can force a victory for himself, and I still do not like the idea of racing him. I think if I had taken Serbia and Greece I would have had a rather good shot, but I really don't like the British wall in France. Losing Munich might make a win impossible for me.

But... hm. Not a draw. The main line I would need to hold to draw is War-Vie-Tri-Ven-Rom, which I don't think Austria could take from me.

1/30/2011 7P My commitment to a 3-way draw should be unambiguous after the Winter, and then the game should end after Fall of 1911. I don't think Britain will be able to do anything.

2/13/2011 The game has been over for a while, and I'm just now getting to my afterthoughts. I'll do one before rereading my diary, then one after.

The first impression I have is that I got lucky. Whenever I explain Diplomacy to people, I start off by saying it's a game with no randomness- and the first thing you do is randomly select what country you start off as. (I then explain that Diplomacy is all about lies.) Austria was a fantastic ally to have; I give myself some credit for handling him well and getting a lot out of the alliance without breaking it, but I would have been screwed if Austria allied with Russia or if Carinthium had been playing Italy.

There were a lot of setbacks and dark years- but Turkey is about the 4th best country, though that's probably an underestimate since so many people dislike playing it. But I made it to the end- which I doubt I would have done if France hadn't fought as hard, allowing Germany could turn south on Austria, or if I hadn't found and kept a rock-solid ally, and then the icing on the cake was going up from 1/4 victory to 1/3 victory by convincing Britain to turn on Germany. I spent a lot of the game thinking about how to get to a solo victory, and would like to think that if I had a good shot at it I would have taken it- but my inability / lack of desire to map out three-four turns ahead made it difficult to see if I ever really had that chance.

**After rereading:** I stand by all of my decisions except the decision to not move into Tys when I took Tun the first time. I'm ambivalent about that plan and I think it's more than hindsight; I was strongly confident that Britain would move out of both, and the right thing to do if he did that was take both, or not take StP. I played a silly hybrid strategy that alienated Britain from a position of weakness. I think I did that because I failed to visualize the outcome in its totality, and I used maximin reasoning as an excuse.



Thoughts about other players:

Two people didn't do the bounces they should have- France in English Channel and Germany in Sweden- and a third possibly wouldn't without my insistence- Russia in the Black Sea. France's failure to do so was clearly disastrous, but Germany seemed to do alright giving up Scandinavia- I don't know what deal he worked out with Russia privately, but England's approach to the treaty of Hler was silly. Take Norway with the fleet and escort Germany into Sweden if you're going to attack France- don't leave those two dots to Russia.

England is a safe position, though, and so mistakes are only lethal if both France and Germany (or *possibly* Germany and Russia, but that's much harder) turn against you. He made it to the end, and overall I got the impression of solid but unremarkable play. (The main thing I would have done, which I suggested to him, was convoy to Picardy- slower, but more certain.)

I don't recall thinking Germany made any mistakes. I think the strategic choice to go East is superior, especially if England and France are locked into a squabble. That helps long-term; he was locked into an E+G alliance by F's early mistake, but E+G tends to end with G dead unless they do something remarkable.

France made a lethal mistake the first turn, but other than that seemed to play fairly well, tactically. The main beneficiary of that was Austria and myself; and so I enjoyed that, at least.

Italy: I'm not sure what to say. Unconventional methods often lead to subpar results, and I don't think he had a sufficient grasp of strategy / negotiation. Italy is a low-ranked country, but it can still do well when played well.

Russia: Overall, I'm not sure how much Russia could have done better. He got a rather significant windfall with respects to Sweden, but he was saddled with Italy, a terrible ally, against two players working well together. He might have been able to appeal to Germany sooner, but I imagine that Germany was singlemindedly focused on France, and that if Germany had gone East, it would have been to Russia's long-term detriment. My ego suggests that if he had worked with me, things would have turned out better for him, but that's hardly an unbiased prediction. It seems unlikely that we would have worked well together, and I suspect I would have been drawn towards the alliance with Austria over him (since I would be the senior partner with Austria rather than the junior partner with Russia).

Austria: Overall, a strong tactical and strategic thinker. While he got unlucky with the country he drew, he did get lucky with who he started next to. Italy was stressful in the short-term but had no staying power, and I was a positive ally overall. Probably the largest windfall he had this game was my weakness for steadfast allies: I doubt he could have sussed that out early on (I appear to exude the opposite impression) and a few times acted counter to that hold. He did a good enough job of managing his armies to make betrayal a poor proposition long-term, but there's only so much you can do there. Perhaps it was a mistake to side with me instead of Russia? I have no clue how things would have turned out otherwise, but I don't which of R or T has a higher chance of betraying A.