

Owls Diplomacy News



JUNE 2007

Short and sweet!

This is a short issue, but filled with quality of course! The 2nd round of the Owls Open Tournament is successfully under way. There are many tight games in progress!

Kyle Billingsley has generously agreed to share his views on Diplomacy. Kyle is a Black Belt with two Owls solo's to his credit, both from tournament games. Kyle finished 12th in last years Owls Open despite missing the first round and is playing on the top board of this years 2nd round.

The Swedish Affair is an article about Russia and Germany and their interests in Scandinavia and broader politics. The author is Andrew Goff, who is one of the toughest Diplomacy players in Australia. I suspect you will enjoy it and gain some new ideas for handling both the white and black pieces.

Some of you may have noticed that I have taken over the running of the inaugural Diplomatic Pouch Tourney, started by Chris Zeph last year. It has been interesting to think about a tournament structure that is different to the Owls Open. Hopefully I can provide a satisfactory Final Round for the event and maybe an Owls player will win the Title?!

Contents

Kyle Billingsley Interview	...	p1
The Swedish Affair	...	p3
Wolfgang's Lament	...	p5
Diplomacy World Link	...	p6

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Interview – Kyle Billingsley

by TM

TM) Kyle, can you tell readers about yourself? Your background, interests, work, studies, country etc

KB) I am 24 years old and living in Los Angeles, California USA (actually in North Hollywood, but its the same thing). I grew up in

Colorado and moved out here to work in Film and Television in the post production audio department. Right now I am working as a Foley Mixer (basically that means I record sound effects). You will be able to find my name in the upcoming movies "Lars and the Real Girl" and "The King of California" if either of them actually make it to the theater (you never know for sure).

TM) How did you enter the Diplomacy hobby? Do you play any other games?

KB) I started playing AD&D when I was in 6th grade and grew into the hobby gaming world. I started playing Advanced Civilization with my big brother (Brendan Billingsley, who is also an Owls member) and eventually got into diplomacy as a freshman in collage. I also play Warhammer Fantasy as a greenskin (Waaagghhhh!!). I mostly divide my time between my work, my wife (Alana Billingsley), martial arts training (Pa Kua style, I teach 4 classes a week, www.pakua.us), hobby gaming, and going to the movies. Here in LA we have one of the best movie theaters in the US, its called the Arclight Hollywood and they show all of there Friday releases at midnight on Thursday and I am always in attendance.

TM) When did you begin playing on the dpjudge?

KB) I started playing on the dpjudge about a year after I started diplomacy. The group I played with in university (Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA) all played on it. They got me in on a private game with them only and from then on out I have been playing it. I stopped playing online during my senior year in collage and just picked it up about 2 years ago. That is when I found the Owls group that Thorin runs so aptly. Thanks again for being so great Thorin.

TM) Can you describe your playing style?

KB) It's hard to say, I think the best playing style involves talking to everyone as much as possible. So I would say my style is communication at all costs. But in general I am

pretty aggressive. I take risks when they need to happen, I don't like defending, and I hate holding. Nothing is less exciting.

TM) What do you do at the start of a game?

KB) I send a press to every power on the board. I try to always be the first one to send press. I think it leaves a good impression when someone sees that the game has started and gets your press at the same time. I find it helps to build allies and friends. I also make sure to respond to everything anyone sends, no matter if I have anything to say or not. People need to see you as having a personality and face if you want to have good allies.

TM) Do you have a favourite power to play? A favourite opening?

KB) Austria used to be my favorite power to play because I find them the hardest to play. I no longer have a favorite, although I really like to play as many different powers as I can. France would be my favorite power because it has been so long since I played France. Favorite opening... again probably Austria. I like BUD-SER TRI-ALB VIE-BUD. Hopefully get Russia to avoid GAL and Italy to open against Turkey. It is a real challenge to pull off, maybe that is why I like it.

TM) What is the worst mistake in a game of Diplomacy that you have ever made?

KB) I have made many mistakes, but I cannot say what the worst is. One I remember to this day is in a game I was playing Turkey and was allied with Italy. We were doing really well and England and Germany were doing well also. I was in a pretty good position for the stab and stabbed Italy the same year that England stabbed Germany. The only problem was that Italy held a grudge and threw himself at me, letting England take out some of Germany and basically just walk into the Italian centers. It was a failure of Diplomacy on my part and I really misread Italy as a player. I thought that game was going to be an easy solo, but I ended up with only 8 centers when England won. I think almost all my great mistakes were from misreading a player, usually getting stabbed early, which just leads to a long war that is good for neither party.

TM) What's the key to achieving a solo victory?

KB) Making everyone trust you the whole game so that you can stab and grow extremely quickly when it is time. You also always have

to weigh your friendship over your solo. I try really hard to become friends with my allies, joking, talking, telling stories and trying to get them involved. It makes it much harder for them to stab you when the time comes, and it makes your stabs much more effective. On the other hand, it makes it harder for you to stab, or at least I feel guilty when I do. But sometimes winning makes you feel better about it :)

TM) Is there a memorable game or opponent you have encountered?

KB) There was a game last year I played where I was Germany in a three-way alliance. The game was amazing because the two other players and I never once squabbled or fought over territories or ending positions. We just took over and split up the board and that was it. It was amazing to see that kind of teamwork from year one. I also played a great game where I was Austria and got hit really hard from the start. I went down to one center before convincing Turkey that I could be helpful. I ended up in third place with 8 centers and fought off a Turkish stab to get a DIAS. It was by far one of my best diplomacy games. It I also learned that you can lie every single year to every single person, and if you do it well people will still believe you. I saw Turkey do it year after year. It was amazing diplomacy.

TM) What is the most valuable lesson you have learned?

KB) Communications is the key. Just because someone is your enemy doesn't mean you don't have anything to talk about. Games are won through convincing everyone that you are, or will be, or could be, their ally. The second most important is, once you attack a person, you better finish them off or it will probably come back to haunt you.

TM) Have you ever played FTF socially or in a tournament?

KB) I started playing Face-to-Face Diplomacy, but I have never played in a FTF tournament. I came really close last fall, but I am often too busy. I use my weekends to spend time with my wife.

TM) Does Diplomacy have any real life applications for you?

KB) think it keeps my mind sharp. Like doing math problems in your head instead of on a calculator. I think that is the best, but it has also much improves my ability to write

business e-mails. I am just better at choosing words.

TM) Could Diplomacy ever rival chess or poker or bridge or....?

KB) I would rather play Diplomacy than any of the others. But I think it takes to long to play to be a real mainstream sport. 6-8 hours is what a FTF game usually lasts when I play. The tournaments have to push to get 4 games done in 2 days.

TM) What advice would you give to new players?

KB) You're gonna lose a lot at the beginning. Try to ally with people who you think are good, and see what kind of advice and strategy they give you. Also, like I have said before, communication. Think of as many things to say as you can, it will save your life and give you opportunities.

I remember a game in which a French player sent out a broadcast after he had been stabbed by the English player about how terrible of a person he was, about how much he lied as so on. And then over the next year or so, sent press to every person telling them about how terrible England was, but in a way that was intelligent and fun. In the end he rallied people to his side and turned the game around. In the end of game statements England talked about how much France was a jerk and ruined the spirit of the game as so on. France just said... "Yeah, but I didn't die and did very well in the end." Or something like that. He just thought of something to say and stuck with it, and it worked.

TM) Much appreciated Kyle!

KB) Thanks for the chance to be famous!

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The Swedish Affair

(or Why Russia Keeps Getting Done)
by Andrew Goff

In recent tournament play in Australia there has been a disturbing trend against Russia, and to a slightly lesser extent Germany. Although in part this can be attributed to the usual comings and goings of the great powers as viewed statistically (with the current dominance of France, and to a slightly lesser extent England). There is also a fundamental

misconception about the way Germany and Russia should be played in the early game, which is having a great effect, particularly on Russia, but also on Germany.

The misconception lies in the belief that Russia and Germany cannot work together. The most glaring example of this almost universal problem arises when we consider the Sweden question.

Fundamentally, Sweden is the only neutral province on the board that only two powers can reach with equal numbers in 1901. All the others are either "safe" (such as Tunis or Bulgaria) or "unsafe" (such as Belgium or Rumania). Sweden alone stands out as the sole neutral province whose control only Diplomacy can resolve. Sometimes I think that Germans bounce the Russian there just because they can. So negotiation is the only solution.

Or is it? One theory suggests that Russia gives Sweden away in order to gain position in the Baltic Sea to launch an attack against the Hun. Would this tactic (if employed on a regular basis to antagonistic Germans) result in a movement away from bouncing in Sweden? My answer is no. Firstly, it will only further perpetuate the myth that Germany and Russia cannot work together, which hardly seems to suggest more access to Sweden for the Russian. Secondly, the counter-tactic to this move (F Den - Swe, A Kie - Den) is so strong that F Bal becomes a besieged unit and Russia has picked enough enemies to ensure a rapid downfall. No, I am convinced the answer lies in a more fundamental strategic misconception rather than such tactical niceties as this.

As you think about it, this strategic fallacy is a disgrace. The game of Diplomacy is designed to be a fluid, dynamic game. The current accepted wisdom that Russia and Germany cannot work together, as well as being completely wrong, is a direct affront to the game.

By eliminating the possibility of a RG coalition against the threat of EF you have removed the major obstacle to that most dangerous of alliances. Is it any wonder that we consistently see EF's (and EF(G)'s) dominating the board when the first line of defence is in tatters by the end of 1901? In fact, the situation is a little more uneven than that, since the southern powers can also now exactly judge Russia's position in the north they can play the Bear to

make sure Russia collapses at just the right moment for them to get most of the centres.

It's catastrophic. Germany wipes out a potential ally and Russia must play totally in the south in order not to be gently squeezed out of the game. Suddenly England and France make all the decisions and Italy, which would otherwise be free to choose between Austria and Turkey is more concerned with the threat of French incursions into the Med than actually growing to a reasonable size.

Enough of the repercussions of the apparently "standard" move of F Den - Swe. What are the alternatives? And why would Germany use them?

Firstly, I contend that there are only two cases where Germany should bounce Russia in Sweden. One, where Russia has opened to Silesia or Prussia, and two, when Germany is part of an EFG alliance.

Where Germany is in an alliance with the English what they most desire is peace in the North so that they can get about the job of dismantling France as quickly as possible. The primary reason that EG alliances fail in the early game is that they waste time and energy trying to take Sweden and St. Petersburg when fast, strong moves against France are required. Russia will keep in these circumstances.

In an FG alliance, Russia's assistance of Germany (by getting F Swe into Nwy and supporting Den - NTH) is crucial to Germany's chances to gain, and bouncing in Sweden in those circumstances is moronic, if not outright suicidal. Again, good play from Germany should ensure that Russia at best cannot stab them and at worst can be stabbed effectively and quickly for all the Scandinavian centres.

In the case of an EF alliance, Russia is Germany's only hope, and getting Russia offside in the hope that this will appease England is dangerously misguided.

Why in the world Germany (of all powers!) would want to enter an EFG (which is 90% of the time just an EF wearing big trousers) is beyond me, so this leaves the case where Russia is obviously attacking you as the only truly legitimate reason to bounce in Sweden.

So why does it happen so often? Usually it is because most of the other powers on the board wish to see Germany diplomatically isolated. Certainly England, France and Austria want to

be sure that Germany has nowhere to turn if they choose to attack them, and England at least is usually petrified of a RG attack (even without French help).

Sadly, most Germans are listening to this shady advice. The same way that A Mun - Ruh guarantees that someone will move to Munich in Fall, a bounce in Sweden usually means that Russia is now open to suggestions about attacking Germany. They certainly don't owe the German any favours. The number of times I have heard German's say "Everyone on the board said to" when I ask them why they bounced my Russia in Sweden is phenomenal. And what makes it even more remarkable is that if there was ever a good reason not to do something strategic, it is if everyone else tells you to do it.

The fact is that 75% of the time Russia getting Sweden is good for the German. And most of the remaining 25% are when Russia is already attacking and you obviously choose to bounce or when it wouldn't matter either way.

I could go into lengthy tactical analysis of how RG alliances work, and how ERG coalitions work, but frankly you are all bright young children and there are many ways to make it happen, so I leave that up to you. What I want to stress is that they are not only possible, but quite strong alliances.

There are some basic elements in the situation which should be discussed. They are all questions from Germany about "Why should I give you Sweden?", and they all have standard answers. If the Russia breaks his word the German knows who to trust. If the Russian keeps his word (as almost always happens, because it is in Russia's interest) then Germany is set for a good game.

Question one: "Why should I give you Sweden?"

Correct Answer: "So that I have a chance to consolidate my position in the south."

Incorrect answer: "So I can build F StP(nc) and attack England."

Germany might ask Russia to build A StP, but never F StP. An F StP will make a long-term alliance impossible. Russia should tell the truth about the southern position. If they think they are going to get Rumania, they should say so. If they think they are getting Vie, Rum and Ank they should say so. Russia really, really wants Germany to be friendly and should be prepared to make genuine concessions, which benefit

the German. Offer any assistance and be good for it. Never lie to Germany as Russia, it is way to guarantee A Ber - Pru and A Mun - Sil. England is Russia's arch-enemy, and working with the German is the only way to solve this problem.

Question two: "What do you intend to build if I give you Sweden?"

Correct answer: "Whatever you want"

Incorrect Answer: "F StP and A War"

This is bleedingly obvious. The "trick" is that you should mean what you say. If Germany gives me Sweden then I really will build F Sev and A StP if he's asked me to. Why not??? We're working together and if Germany were gunning my Russia they would be foolish to have given me Sweden. Imbecilic.

Question three: "How can I trust you?"

Correct answer: "Because it is in my interests to work with you as long as you don't attack me."

Incorrect answer: "Because if you don't I'll kill you."

The correct answer is true. So, as it happens, is the incorrect answer, but there's no need to say it. Frankly, it astonishes me that Russia would ever be first in for an attack on Germany. Any gains they make are just lost to England when the German is eliminated. Attacking Germany should be Russia's last resort. Sadly at the moment it is all too often necessary.

Generally, Russia and Germany attacking each other is as constructive as Italy attacking France with one army. The averages bear this out quite dramatically. Get over F Den - Swe. It doesn't help Germany. And it results in Russia getting done.

It is in both Germany and Russia's interest to assume a stance of benevolent neutrality at the start of the game, and sometimes an active alliance is the only way to prevent EF from overrunning the board.

Hopefully, if everyone listens to the gist of this article, we can pull the Russian average back above two at the next tournament... now if only we can convince people that EG alliances can work we would be almost back to a balanced game!

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WOLFGANG'S LAMENT

Broadcast message from Germany in owlsopen07_2f:

I wish I'd seen it coming
Oh, the French are really scum
He played me for a sucker, yes
I feel so very dumb.

And then there's my friend Russia
Who in 1901 forgot
To launch a fleet in old St. Pete
And help take Norway, not!

Which leaves my friend the English
With whom they're in cahoots
Expect some shiny footwear
With them to lick his boots.

So leaders all rejoice to hear
My tale of woe's not done
This is my great diatribe
I've only just begun.

Italy on a puppet's string
France the master there
Tunis, Venice... oh my soul
No troops anywhere!

Austria's progress is hard to see
Rip Van Winkle-like
1902 has come and gone
But Russia's taken a hike.

Yes, Russia's no longer Galacia bound
He'd rather drink my beer
And in Berlin he may likely be
Before too long, I fear.

And finally there's Turkey
Who's fleet has just returned
Which way to go? I don't know
I hope he won't get burned.

So friend and foe don't feel bad
I've come to realize
You cannot trust what you see
Before your very eyes.

It looks to me I'm doomed to fail
Guess that's a guarantee
But grant me this, I beg of you -
A Pyrrhic Victory.

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Diplomacy World

<http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/dw97.pdf>
Take a look at a BIG Dip zine....

Thorin Munro, Sydney, 3rd June, 2007