

Owls Diplomacy News



AUGUST 2007

Work & Play!

The July mail out was not a real issue of ODN and I hope that this one makes up for that! I can only blame 'work' for the lapse – the quote marks because it's actually been enjoyable!

Through all of July I have been building my first web site. I know there are many IT professionals amongst the Diplomacy hobby, and some of you might think my efforts a little DIY – but the creative process, particularly the content demanded that I take this approach. In any case, I have no doubt it will remain a work in progress! And while I don't mean to crassly advertise my start-up business, some of you might be curious. So feel free to take a look at www.tangential.com.au and give me some feedback or tips!

On the Diplomacy front, all bar one (2g) of the second round Owls Open games are complete. The Time Draw will be effective by the end of August when the third round will begin. The results table to date is VERY crowded at the top and players across the top three+ boards all have strong chances for the 2007 title.

This issue, Ivan Milovanovic, current equal first in the Owls Open Tournament has granted an interview. Bill Perry has written from the point of view of a player who 'never breaks his word' and Gerry Evenwel shares the challenges and joys of minor powers. Trust you enjoy it.

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Interview – Ivan Milovanovic

by TM

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

IM) I'm 33, married and have 3 months old baby. We live in Belgrade, the capitol of Serbia. I'm software engineer, but work in major international company as sales and merchandising analyst. (Let's say I'm sick of coding: too stressful and underpaid in my country). I'm a big movie fan (used to work in video club during my studies) as well as computer games. Unfortunately I don't have much time for those anymore.

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

IM) Some 8 or 9 years ago I stumbled on diplomacy while browsing the internet. I joined a game or two but then my computer broke and I abandoned the games. I've rediscovered diplomacy in September 2005.

TM) When did you begin playing on the dpjudge?

IM) I've never played diplomacy anywhere but on dpjudge. All of my finished games, except for one (evergreen), belongs to owls series. So, I'm not experienced player overall, but I'm fairly experienced owls player if such thing exists.

TM) Can you describe your playing style?

IM) I'm not sure if I've developed any particular style yet. I'm still exploring the possibilities diplomacy is offering.

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

IM) It's the most difficult part for me. I watch and listen, I try to figure out who is who as soon as possible. I try to send press to everyone even if it is just a short one.

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

IM) I don't have favorite power or opening, although I would like to experiment with Italy more then any other power.

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

IM) In the second round of last year owls tournament (B game) I stabbed Germany in order to win one more dot. This helped Turkey (Gert J.T.) to win solo.

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

IM) Know your enemy. Keep in touch with everyone. Divide the rest of the board, so that when they realise you are going to solo it's too late.

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

IM) Few games were really fun to play, but I can't remember exactly which one. I try to learn something from each game and every opponent I meet, but I don't keep track. As soon as the game is finished I forget its name.

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

IM) "Never trust anyone" doesn't work – you'll become paranoid. You have to trust someone, but you have to keep your eyes and ears wide open. "Keep your friends close, keep your enemies closer"

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

IM) No

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

IM) One of the reasons I play diplomacy is to improve my English. It helps me think in English, it helps me express myself in English – the skills I need everyday at work.

TM) What advice would you give to new players?

IM) Don't play too many games at once in the beginning; focus on one or two the most. Don't take anything personally. Learn from your mistakes. Thanks again Thorin for all the games..

TM) Much appreciated Ivan!

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2 ½ years of Owls Statistics

by Thorin Munro

During the discussion about the death of the middle game I collated these results. I was very pleased to see the high percentage of solo's, more than 40%. And the second table indicates you significantly improve your solo chances by keeping three or more opponents around to the end. I suspect it makes it that much harder for the minor powers to coordinate a defence.

Completed Owls games 2005- June 2007

RESULT	OPEN #Games	OPEN %	INVITE #Games	INVITE %
SOLO	68	47	28	43
2-DIAS	7	5	4	6
3-DIAS	29	20	16	25
4-DIAS	33	23	9	14
5-DIAS	6	4	5	8
6-DIAS	2	1	2	3
7-DIAS	0	0	1	2
TOTALS	145	100	65	100

For SOLO results, How many powers still alive in the Fall prior victory?

# Powers in play?	OPEN #Games	OPEN %	INVITE #Games	INVITE %
7	0	0	0	0
6	2	3	3	11
5	27	40	6	21
4	23	34	12	43
3	15	22	7	25
2	1	1	0	0
TOTALS	68	100	28	100

Diplomacy Play Style - Keeping the Word

by Bill Perry

I've used the same play style throughout my on-line diplomacy life - which is entirely recorded in owls games. The style involves, in a nutshell, keeping my word no matter what. Enough questions have been asked about my play style, and why I use it, that I recently posted an end game summary on it - which triggered this article. Right up front I'm going to clear up something. This play style - keeping your word no matter what - is not a commentary on morality in real life or anything else. I want to clear that up first – it seems to be a big misconception that it somehow is any

different from a play style that involves stabbing anything that moves. It's a game – and this is one of many ways to play it.

So, why do I play this style? I play for the fun of the diplomacy - not the points - and there is absolutely nothing that gets you more diplomatic communications than being recognised as a proven rabid adherent to the "Deal" and your given word. As a side benefit, this behaviour - when successfully proven and established in game - assures that you will be the one the other powers look to for an alliance. But that's the trick – simply keeping your word, no matter what, would be suicidal in a game full of cutthroats waiting for the first sign of weakness. Anyone would think I'm crazy to try to use a strategy like that - and they'd be correct.

However, this play style has more to it than just keeping your word. As always - the devil is in the details. The best way to describe the overall style is to list my internal rules and why they exist.

1) Never tell an outright lie.

Now, this gets kind of tricky - as a lie is in the eye of the beholder. Being completely trustworthy to your given word - just means lying takes a different form. I'll never outright lie - but holding back critical information - talking about things that can be true - but not within the context of what the other power thinks it is – is all fair game to me. It's part of my fun. So when someone asks if I'm allied to someone - I'd probably say that I'd never trust that power in a million years. All technically true - but certainly misleading. And for consistency I do it whether the answer is true or false on a lot of questions. One could even call it a lie. But the point is - in this strategy - that you tell the truth and build up trust that you are going to follow through on what you DO say you'll do. This takes the form of telling a power where you're going to move - if you say you're moving there - prove it. The simple fact is - you have to prove yourself reliable - all over again - in every game you enter. This means - you don't lie directly and never say you'll do something when you don't. Most think, well if you always do what you say – then you are a sitting duck for betrayal! That's a mistaken impression, by not having read what I just wrote. The trick is - ONLY tell someone your going to do something if you're going to do it. The rest is open to you talking about how you don't trust that power and so on. Telling the truth is a very... very... powerful weapon. But its only

useful, if you've established it for a fact. And the only way to do this is to consistently follow the rule - Never tell an outright lie. Back up what you say. Nothing says you can't change your mind on something, and tell them you are keeping your options open. Just don't do it at the last second - as it's the fact you tell the truth you want to establish - not that you're a wordsmith using slippery terms or - oooh - you didn't use the word promise or some such garbage. Yet, some things you must keep to no matter what - where there is no possibility of ever deviating from the plan. And that brings us to - giving your word - which is a whole different thing than telling the truth. The truth is flexible and can change over time. Your word cannot.

2) Giving your word.

Once you give your word - that's it. Even if it causes your destruction - don't back off of it. Why would you do this, you ask? For the pure unadulterated joy and fun of the diplomacy that can result from it. For the insane pleasure one gets - when the powers at large realise what a two edged sword your word can be when wielded in a competent way. The key to giving your word is that you never give it on something you can box yourself in over. Often, powers who realise I will keep my word - ask me something and want me to give my word on it so they can get a yes/no answer - no if I won't give my word on the answer to the question. This is simply solved up front when I notify the power(s) of my intent to keep my word - and my intent to never answer a question where my word is asked as a guarantee of the answer. This insures that my not answering something is not an answer in itself. It varies whether I state this up front to someone I'm dealing with or wait till they try this pitiful trick on me. I simply won't answer questions like that ever. It also immediately damages my opinion of that power which makes and deal that is crafted even more limited. Which brings us to about the only thing you should ever give your word on - the deal.

3) The deal.

The deal is how I play. I crave a deal that I can give my word to. It is everything that all my diplomacy is centered on. If I can't craft a deal before the first orders are entered - I'm off to a slow start. For sure the first deals I'll ever craft in a game will be very short term. And NEVER craft an open ended deal - always caveat it with time or goals and multiple conditions in which it will be rendered NULL and VOID.

Sounds like I make very detailed deals doesn't it! I do. It's crafted over multiple conversations - usually long - with the other power(s) the deal involves. When I give my word to a deal - it will be executed as laid out - which makes me VERY careful on what deals I'll accept. Sometimes I don't luck out in neighbors and I don't get any deals for the first year or two. But they learn to trust from the fact I simply agree to some DMZ's with conditions where no word is involved - though I tell the truth and leave it open where I'll say - this DMZ will be between us and if either of us enters it it's WAR. Truth. If enter it - it will be war. Same for them. No word or deal required. But in order to make this strategy work - you need a deal that you can accept. It has to be crafted in a way that neither or us get burned and if the other betrays it (usually by a build or a threatening movement potential - ie. before it actually becomes a threat) they are seriously hurt for minimal gain. So deals are hard to craft - and I never accept one I don't like. I also don't make deals - or very rigid ones which are rarely accepted - with players who even slightly offer a deal that has a disadvantage build in. Never make multiple deals that are not mutually possible. I pretty much write powers off who offer deals that are not to mutual benefit, as not having the intelligence to even temporarily put off their greed in order to gain something. Hence, time limits, goal limits, conditions that automatically NULL and VOID the deal, are always built into anything I will accept.

When you are the sole power that is willing to keep your word no matter what - you live in a very dangerous world. The only true defense of people taking advantage of this - is to only give your word to deals that are transitory in nature, fragile - break easily if any sign of trouble, and mutually beneficial - or its worthless and I won't give my word to it (ie. Sign on to the treaty). And the most crucial aspect of this style of play - you must be absolutely ruthless when a deal is broken. Which brings us to the deal breaker.

4) Broken Deal.

When a deal is broken - forget every aspect of the world - you have now one and only one focus in the world. The destruction of the offending power. Suicidal all out - go for the throat type of stuff. Now obviously you may have to keep some strategy going to keep your power as great as possible in the time it takes to (in the order of feasibility):

I) Utterly destroy that power.

II) Damage them as much as possible for as long as possible.

III) Prevent them from gaining as much as possible.

IV) Insure your centers go to whomever is best equipped to wreak your revenge for you.

Basically, your entire focus shifts to a new overriding objective. Making life miserable for the offending power. This does not mean being rude. I can think of one game when I convinced the other powers to allow me to live long enough to wreak vengeance on such a power. And it was one of the most fun games I ever had. Because of my spirit of consistent play style they let me draw out with next to nothing. After I saw the offender obliterated.

Do I take it personally? No. I talk with friend and enemy alike - all through the game. But I have found nothing is more fun than playing the self-righteous power that absolutely keeps their word - and absolutely is unforgivable when a deal is broken. And it should be noted - a deal is an official signed act - where I have given my word to it. If betrayed by someone simply lying to me without a deal - I am still open to dealing with them later - its only an oath breaker I will see hanging from the rafters - or as high as I can pull them or get someone else to do it for me.

Which brings us to the absolutely most critical part of this play style that there is.

5) Communication

Always communicate - friend or foe. State your intentions of keeping your word and not to accept any deals with you unless they understand fully the consequences of breaking it. Never be rude or childish. Even powers who never send communications get communications from me - I'll comment on their situation all the time. The most important time to communicate - is before the first move.

Personally, I can never craft a deal with anyone who can't communicate back with me in detail. This does not mean I won't still be friendly toward them or help them out - it just means that they are more likely in my sights as a potential SC feeding ground rather than an ally - which requires a deal. If I can't start the foundations for a future deal (DMZ's with conditions) before the first move - then I'm probably about to be squashed in a bad way. Most of my best communications are with stalwart enemies where we keep talking things over - you never know when a new deal will be

required. I have yet to see a power that is quiet prosper in any game I remember. It does not matter if they are quiet because they are on the other side of the world - have no current common interest - or just not communicative - they do not fare well, on average.

Now it may have been misleading when I said don't be rude. This does not mean you can't threaten with a self-righteous anger thundering over the miscreant (no cursing or personal insulting) who has dared to break the deal - or has implied that they might deviate from the deal in any way and expect you not to implement total war. But in 95% of your communications - the threatening thundering approach is not required. That is reserved for those who do not believe you will do what you say. And its usually tailored to the individual power, in tone and content, whom you should know by the time you might need to threaten them.

Well, that about covers the "Keeping the Word" or "Honest to a Fault" play style. I don't think any one of the above parts of the overall strategy can ever be left out and have you expect it to work. The key is to establish that you mean what you say through example demonstrated by actions. Words are meaningless until you prove them after all. Also - with this play style - I never consider past games - true players personalities - or anything else. You earn the deal by communications and how I judge you as that power in that world - and rarely will I discuss things out of character.

The diplomacy and opportunities for exciting diplomacy are endless with this play style - no other style comes close in my opinion. However, if you are the type of player who enters the game expecting to take over the world - it's not for you. This style works best with a well crafted deal that some fool breaks because they think you will not react at the first sign of provocation. Or mistaken build. And as long as there are oath breakers, this style will allow you to conquer all. It's when everyone keeps the deal that you end up in a draw. Only when multiple powers gang up early on you does this play style fail to see you through. But then most styles will not see you through that anyway. Personally, I depend on oath breakers for the really big advantages I get. They never really believe I'll do what I say after all - and my word - is a two edged sword, which they seem to only think can cut me. Go with what works for you, and good luck!

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The Great Minor Power

by Gerry Evenwel

(Proud to be a "mean" brown belt!)

A critical look at what to do when you've been fatally stabbed...

After the shock, denial, and anger (repeat as often as necessary), it is time to move into acceptance. You've been stabbed and a solo is pretty much out of the question. What should you do now? Your position is not strong enough to control a draw and the players remaining on the board are too good to expect a slip up. Face it, you are a minor power and it now all about points. Here are some guidelines to assist in your new role.

Stop sulking: The quickest way for a minor power to get completely eliminated is to sulk. Nobody likes a bitter, condescending, vengeful, and generally unreliable neighbour. Well maybe vengeful if it is directed elsewhere, however the best minor powers are those who add excitement and open up possibilities. Good humour about stabs is always a plus.

Get off of the growth kick: We all want to grow, however as a minor power your chances are slim for several reasons. One, you are probably in your home centers defending them. Two, if you are not in your home centers it is because your home centers were taken. Three, if you demand or even bring up the growth "requirement" in deals with major powers they will likely find it easier to simply say "yes" and then take your centers. Conclusion, growth is not your primary concern - instead let you new allies "reward" you for good service.

My enemy is my friend: Look toward your former enemy to prop you up. The power you were pounding before you got stabbed from the other direction can make a useful friend. Offer him tasty possessions, inside information, incredible positions in you lines, whatever you can to get him to like having you around. This works particularly well when it is the second largest power and you are offering him a way to help him become the largest power.

My friend is my enemy is my friend: Another good alternative is the ally who just stabbed. If you had a genuine good relationship before the stab and you have a good defensive line, offer him alternatives. I admit that this is a little more difficult to work out since he probably had plans to take a healthy portion of your territories or else he

would not have stabbed, however do not rule him out on account of some twisted notion of revenge.

Guilt: For many Diplomacy players, stabs are bittersweet (black-hearted black belts are the notable exception). Use guilt when you can to get a long-term deal. There is a fine line, because most diplomacy players will only hang on to their guilt for a turn or two, then they recover.

Being a minor power can be fun and challenging, testing your diplomacy skills and providing memorable games. For those of you who are seasoned players and not too worried about your owls rating, I recommend taking over a position as a minor power when they become available. The players in the game will thank you and if you can turn the power around, the feeling compares to orchestrating a solo.

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Owls Player Feedback

“Hi Thorin, If you have nothing to send out, then perhaps you should reprint Andrew Goff's article on Russia and Sweden until players get the point. (I have recently had a poor game as Russia after being bounced in Sweden). If I find the time myself, I was considering trying my hand at writing and cobbling together some sort of article. Regards, Peter McNamara”

[Please do Peter! And I want to thank and acknowledge each one of you who have written articles in this issue and previously. Our collective efforts make the difference. TM]

Thorin Munro, Sydney, 2nd August, 2007