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ARCHIVES LISTING

Due to its present large size, the archives listing will only appear infrequently or when substantial additions have been added to the archives. Since Hoosier Archives #19 was published, the only non-current issues added were Brobdinag #21-22 and 24.

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

Hoosier Archives goes original! For the first time, an original article and not a reprint is presented--in fact, two of them! A couple of months ago, before Brenton Ver Ploeg and I had to start worrying about law finals, he commented to me in a letter about John Smythe's article "Germany" that appeared in Hoosier Archives #8. I obtained Brenton's permission to edit the "article" and publish it in Hoosier Archives. Here it is.

VER PLOEG ON GERMANY

by Brenton Ver Ploeg

(A counter to Smythe's classic "Germany" in Brobdinag #63)

As far as I'm concerned, the whole importance of the game of Diplomacy is couched in terms of initiative. You have to get started, and fast, or else you end up as a target. I have never really bought the argument that it's wise to be the second largest power because then nobody want to ally against you. It seems to me that this is too often an excuse for bad Diplomacy and little else. Perhaps it's easier if you have a few less pieces, but I simply cannot see that it's in the worst interests of the player to be aggressive--particularly so with Germany.

It has always seemed best to me to have Germany risk all as quickly as possible. It is true that she is very vulnerable to attacks from numerous sides and that her supply centers are easily blocked. One of the factors that most sadly influences the fate of Germany is that the home centers can be jammed up by a single stab by Austria, and almost as effectively from Russia or England. Therefore, it's very customary to have Germany short a few units because she has no place to build. To my mind, the solution to this central dilemma is not at all the slow expansion against a single country, (usually France) and then the attack against the former ally (England). That, in fact, seems foolhardy to me. Suppose that when the attack on England begins, you have a situation in the East that has either a strong Austria or Russia. Ordinarily, this is inevitable by the time that England and Germany manage to eliminate France. My contention is that even if Germany gets a good jump on England, and manages to build several fleets to do so, they have succeeded in opening themselves to an almost inevitable expansion move by Austria or Russia, whoever is pre-eminent in the area.

Consider the likelihood of success should, say, Austria attack Germany. Germany

has to have at least two, and hopefully three, fleets for use against England. EVEN IF THEY SUCCEED AGAINST ENGLAND AND GAIN CENTERS, A GOOD AUSTRIAN SPRING STAB WILL JAM UP THE GERMAN CENTERS FOR DEFENSE, AND WILL PREVENT BUILDS. An almost irresistible temptation to my mind.

Alternately, what is the danger under an English-German alliance? If is one and obviously one alone--that England will attack you. Is this that dangerous? Weigh the two stab potentialities. After the demise of France, the North Sea would obviously be neutralized. If England managed to gain three centers somewhere on the board, say in Scandinavia or Italy, the builds would not immediately imperil Germany, or at least not in the home centers. True, England is in a flanking position, but skillful anticipation of English potentialities will negate that advantage. Germany has the more mobile central position, and can shift units quickly. England, in order to attack Germany, must telegraph her intention to an alert Germany. An English stab will probably take a couple of centers away from Germany. An Austrian stab will probably knock Germany out of the game.

Now suppose that, instead of attacking England after France is almost eliminated, England and Germany attack France AND Russia early in the game? Obviously, this takes some work. Hopefully, Italy can be turned against France, and Russia can be made a target. I think it's safe to say that it's not possible for one person to do all this--Germany must have a close alliance with either Turkey or England for game length, and MUST, OBVIOUSLY, agree competely with England as to tactics in this matter. Say France in 1901, and the Russian attack to open in 1902. If either Turkey or Austria helps, the situation is far superior to allowing the East to do as it pleases while Germany contents herself with moderate growth in the West. England can go in through Northern Russia, and seize Moscow, while Germany helps in this regard, and takes Warsaw for herself.

Note that a second advantage is beginning to emerge. If England is strictly prohibited from more than two armies (fair enough, of course, if Germany refrains from building more than one more fleet) then it's to the German advantage to support England into Russian central areas--while there, they depend on German land support, and cannot be assisted by the English sea power. In short, if England stabs, she stands to lose a lot too.

A fair English/German alliance implies a parity of two for Germany, who is, I think, with eight, certainly no stronger than England with six. This, again, is fair to England, and does not imply that German negotiation must be done in an aggressive manner to the point that you must lose the politeness which John (Smythe) so accurately describes. Certainly, it's not that bad a deal for England either, who has the option of success if her Diplomacy is strong enough.

From here on, of course, it's a matter of which player is the best diplomat and has the best tongue on paper. England/Germany are there, but Austria or Turkey are probably there too. If Germany is in a flanking position against Austria after the Russian invasion, and can get Austria employed against Turkey, then the Austrians are wide open for a very hard stab at their rear, and are unlikely to become the sort of super-power that will endanger Germany no matter WHAT strategy is employed. I make no predictions. If Turkey has done his work, he may have an English alliance, and will crush Germany. No matter what happens, Germany has TACTICALLY succeeded, I suggest, far better with this plan that would have been possible under the one suggested by Smythe--a formula which has always seemed somewhat conservative to me.

After all, when only three major powers are left, the two will beat the one, no matter what, if they start rather equally. It is true that Germany has to do almost twice as much work to succeed as any of the other countries, but I think that they are blessed with one of the most open attacking positions on the board save for my favorite country of Russia. In spite of the admitted fact that Germany doesn't win very many games, I think a good German player has a much greater chance for success than a player for Italy, France, or Austria, though Austria may be about a tie. I positively hate to play England, which is inordinately dull, though easy to play, and have the same feeling to a lesser extent concerning Turkey. Russia is enjoyable to the extreme, however, and for the player who wants no guarantees save a fair chance to apply his talents, Russia offers the best solution. But I cannot agree that Germany suffers from the woes of the

world as John (Snythe) implies. Now ITALY.....THERE is a country to shun!

(This last sentence gave me a toe-hold to coax another "article" out of Mr. Ver Ploeg in a subsequent letter. I have edited it also.)

WHY I HATE ITALY
by Erenton Ver Ploeg

Italy is doubtless the worst country to play in Diplomacy and there are several reason for that. Italy has nowhere to go. Defensively, she is wide open to attack from one side when she leans far out to attack in another, and that's inherent in Italy's position. Other powers can gain centers in one front, and THEN move to a major attack while still leaving some pieces to guard against and therefore hopefully discourage a stab. Pity poor Italy, however, because in order to GET those extra pieces, she has to lean in the first place.

Offensively, it's just as bad. Assume she moves against Austria, which is about the only way to make headway early in the game. After Austria collapses, only expert Diplomacy will save Italy from a Russo-Turkish alliance, and often even that is not enough. Players of equal ability in Turkey will almost always take the Russian alliance. Russia is the best hope, but is not really a hope at all if she is pushed in the center or north, as is often the case. All too often, Russia is MORE than willing to withdraw troops from the south to use against Germany or England. That obviously limits the diplomatic offensive capability.

For this reason, players with experience for Italy often bide their time. The better players often go so far as to SUPPORT Austria, if Austria is under attack. But, that's no game to play. If a player sits back and waits to see what develops too long, he will generally find that it's a big attack--against HIM.

So, that's a tactical and a diplomatic reason. There remains one more tactical reason, which is always a factor if the previous two points go by the board, and we find Italy as a major moving power, say with eight or nine pieces--she has less ability to bring new units to the front than any other power by a very considerable margin. This may well be what constitutes the biggest Italian weakness. Often good players will set up the alliance structure with such skill that they pass the first hurdle and make Italy into a fighting power. But the sad part about Italy as a contending power is that she has to contend and that usually is the end of her. An army, in order to get out of Italy, has to pass a tortuous route. If there are two builds, and Italy needs armies, where are they to go? Venice is one but western armies get blocked. But if there is a second build, it's at ROME. I don't even have to mention that disadvantage. It takes a year and a half of play to even get an army out of Italy from Rome! Of course, you can hold back fleets to convoy, but is that better? It will always take two, maybe three fleets, contrasted with the single fleet in the North Sea for England, and even when the armies are landed, they do not have a great deal of mobility. England, to go back to the example, can throw armies over a vast territory through only the North Sea.

Enough? Italy, which is sometimes fun to play, is nevertheless the worst country on the board. She is surrounded by enemies and has few advantages. Good play for Italy probably involves a very good "special pair" (Calhamer's wording) with Austria, and a move against France in conjunction with both Germany and England--PROVIDED that you know that you can trust one of them to attack the other after France has fallen. It seems clear, to me at least, that a given player will have to work much harder for success in Italy than anywhere else.

Postscript: It has just occurred to me that I forgot to give Mr. Ver Ploeg a "Diplomatic" introduction. He is considered by John McCallum and others of the more experienced publishers to be one of the top three active Diplomacy players today. He is also a Director of The Diplomacy Association.

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