

An ornate decorative border in gold and black, featuring repeating foliate and scrollwork patterns, frames the central text area.

Diplomacy

Conversations
with
Barbosa

Diplomacy

Conversations with Barbosa

Erik van Mechelen

This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/diplomacy>

This version was published on 2019-11-05



Leanpub

This is a [Leanpub](#) book. Leanpub empowers authors and publishers with the Lean Publishing process. [Lean Publishing](#) is the act of publishing an in-progress ebook using lightweight tools and many iterations to get reader feedback, pivot until you have the right book and build traction once you do.

© 2019 Erik van Mechelen

Before Diplomacy was taken up by the famous American game designer, before it became widespread, before it was ever played by post or online, this game of cunning, deceit, and grand strategy was played in the taverns and cabarets and tunnels from Paris to Saint Petersburg by the commonfolk of Europe. These are conversations on opening strategy between an aspirant and a true master of the form, the Portuguese poet, one Frederico Barbosa.

Contents

A Mysterious Letter	1
34 coins	2
Overture	4
Philosophy	6
The Score	9
Opening Theory	10
Notation	10
The Basics	11
Turkey	14
1901	14
The Balkan Concentration	15
The Crimean Crusher	16
Ship of the Desert	17
The Turkish Hedgehog	18
Beyond 1902	19
Frederico's Choice	19
Russia	20
1901	20
Ukraine System, Southern Variation	21
Livonia System, Ukraine Variation	22
Northern System, The Squid	23

CONTENTS

Southern System, Rumanian Variation	23
Beyond 1902	23
Frederico’s Choice	24

A Mysterious Letter

In the following letter I received some years back I learned of a game today known as Diplomacy:

Dearest Diplomat,

This message finds you at a tumultuous time. The Great Powers are consolidating their positions. Units, fleets and armies, are gathering at their borders, preparing for possible armed conflict.

While I may be a lowly plebeian, I have eavesdropped on diplomats in my travels from the corners of cafes and from balconies above private courtyards. From speculation on information gathered in this fashion I have grown relatively rich. And in a world, mind you, where the future is difficult to predict!

Apologies, for I have digressed. The main point is this: Despite my status, my modest travels from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Iberian peninsula to the south of England and finally to the villages outside of Saint Petersburg have put me in a position to impart knowledge befit a rising diplomat in these critical moments of the new century.

Before I share more, I must ask something of you. I have enclosed an insert of a game I came across, which I urge you to review.

With that, I am at your service.

Respectfully,
Frederico Barbosa

PS Don't forget to review the insert of the game.

34 coins

Great! I'm glad you opened this part.

This is the game I have delighted to partake in with a rather rowdy bunch at a tavern near my present location. They coaxed me to their table with the promise of a mug and the insinuation of a good time to be had. They needed a seventh player, for this game could not be played otherwise. We drew lots and were then given titles akin to the seven Great Powers of our day.

To begin the game, each person held three (or four) of the thirty-four coins (the Russian held four). The remaining twelve coins were scattered on the table's grainy, uneven, and beer-stained surface.

The ringleader went on to explain that the game was deceptively simple. All there was to do was persuade the others to let you have eighteen of the thirty-four.

Already, this was a pretty interesting game. (Who would allow one of out seven players to amass such a bounty?) But even at the start, you can imagine the mounting predicaments. How would we divide the twelve unowned coins? And, once that feat complete, how on earth would I persuade the others to give me their coins, particularly the shiny ones!

There were of course in this affair additional territorial and resource components to consider, as well as the fact that all our decisions occurred simultaneously and under the table. (My shins are now quite battered.)

I will not bore you though with the spatial relationships nor the economy, from which the constraints of positioning, logistics, and tempo came into my attention. Unlike a game of cards, no player may drunkenly hand his whole lot of coins to another by disastrously bad play, boredom, or interest in a passing lad or lass.

My counterparts were delighted that I joined in. And they were even more pleased that I seemed to understand the finer points. I

need not remind you I grew up thieving in the streets and can don a remarkably good costume should I need to pass through guarded gates unnoticed.

I inquired about their little game of thirty-four coins and they assured me that although much had been discussed and even written about the game, that it was surely in its infant stages. What's more, in times of peace, how else would the generals occupy themselves?

Having secured eighteen coins, I promptly spent them on a round for the table and finally bid this crew of drunken adolescents adieu. I made for the port to catch a lift to my next destination.

So it was that I had my first introduction of the game that would become Diplomacy. What follows is what I have gleaned from conversations with dear Frederico. Any knowledge imparted here I owe to Mr. Barbosa. As such you will see me quote him regularly.

Overture

After receiving the mysterious letter, with great fortune I tracked down Frederico Barbosa. I found clues I later wondered if he intended for me to find, not unlike seeds of misinformation spread to eager ears. Was he a chef, a carpenter, a spy? Though I came to understand him best as a Portuguese poet, his identities nevertheless seemed as numerous as the cities and seas he'd traveled.

My main contribution to the pursuit he'd already begun was to assist him in clarifying the rules and preparing the game first introduced to me as *34 Coins* for more widespread play. He seemed to think that putting the skill of the diplomat in the hands of the commoner would benefit society. "See what a life such skill has granted the likes of me, and from such a dire starting position!"

How could I disagree? Hence, we developed the game further, testing its merits and responding to its demerits and detractors, all the while hoping a better game designer than we would take it up and spread it more effectively to the masses.

In the years that followed I played many games of Diplomacy, though fewer than I would have liked. Even when Frederico's charming persuasion accompanied my enthusiasm in this back-alley tavern or that underground cabaret, it was exquisitely difficult to convince strangers to play with us, times being what they were. It helped that we were able to recruit a modest bevy of gamemasters throughout Europe to conduct Diplomacy games by post, although these games tended to be reserved for the upper classes.

Diplomacy is a great game. A game of cunning, deceit, and deception, to be sure, but also one of careful planning, collaboration, and creativity. It calls on the player to at once be dangerous and delectable.

Whenever I played it called to mind the struggles the Great Powers themselves engaged in. The desire to expand their territories. To secure their borders. To ensure growth and prosperity for their people. To fix the memory of their achievements in the legends told by their followers.

While I only played with the honorable Frederico Barbosa a single time—he swiftly soloed and departed before the night was out—his presence did linger over me as I feasted upon the dawn of a spring day in the south of France, 1908. Physically, I was exhausted, mentally spent, my mind dulled by late night wine with five other defeated diplomats, and yet there was an energy moving about me. You might say it was the spirit of Mr. Barbosa, the memory of our negotiations, the charm of his diplomacy, the brilliance of his deadly backstab, to which I will later relate.

After the sun had dissolved the fog mid-morning I descended to the streets of the 5th arrondissement, where, at a street cafe I watched the passersby, sipped a refreshing coffee, and revisited each moment of the game, how I'd made my decisions, and what I might have done better. All this in a journal bestowed to me by Frederico. Besides playing as many games of Diplomacy as one can, reviewing and discussing past games was a practice Mr. Barbosa suggested was the best way to improve.

Philosophy

Frederico fancied discussions *about* Diplomacy as much as anyone. Sometimes he preferred them to playing the game itself.

What is the fundamental nature of Diplomacy?, he asked me prior to our only every game together.

For me, Diplomacy is a 7-player game about area control guided by secret and simultaneous piece movement. The player who most effectively manages and strategically expands his territory wins or takes part in a draw. If we advance the discussion to include game theory, all good strategies include one thing: effective negotiation. In a word, Diplomacy.

Mr. Barbosa didn't mind this description, though he had his quibbles.

He who can influence his opponents to collaborate at the right moments and misdirect them in others improves his drawing and winning chances. The game was a ritual, he argued, which had comparisons to Machiavellian political philosophy as well as to notions of *realpolitik* present in the era contemporary to the starting positions of the game: 1901.

When I was unsure of what was meant by 'Realpolitik', he produced a book from the mid-19th century by the German, Ludwig von Rochau. "Keep this secret, keep this safe," Frederico whispered.

I studied "Grundsätze der Realpolitik angewendet auf die staatlichen Zustände Deutschlands" carefully with the help of a translator visiting from Berlin. The following passage stood out:

"The study of the forces that shape, maintain and alter the state is the basis of all political insight and leads to the understanding that the law of power governs the world of states just as the law

of gravity governs the physical world. The older political science was fully aware of this truth but drew a wrong and detrimental conclusionâ€”the right of the more powerful. The modern era has corrected this unethical fallacy, but while breaking with the alleged right of the more powerful one, the modern era was too much inclined to overlook the real might of the more powerful and the inevitability of its political influence.”

I discovered that von Rochau himself was exiled here in Paris until the 1848 uprising and returned to take an influential role in the national liberal party. In an all-but-promised twist of history, Rochau’s initial ideas were conflated and overcome by Otto von Bismarck’s statecraft which unified Germany. As such, before the dawn of the new century, the word *realpolitik* was ubiquitous but changed from its first meaning.

If we see Diplomacy as a ritual of negotiation, we see several kinds: conflict resolution, creative problem solving, trust and relationship building, distribution of limited resources, a handing out of mercy or justice. It is also involves sacrifice, revenge, collaboration and competition in an environment of scarcity, acts of injustice, and arbitrary scapegoating, to name but a few.

Mr. Barbosa again had his issues with my summation, and wondered if Diplomacy was best played amorally. (That is, *without* morality; to emphasize, amoral is not the same as immoral.)

In an amoral landscape, I did not have the ground to stand upon to call something sacrificial or vengeful. As soon as I attempted to argue with him, however, Mr. Barbosa often shapeshifted into Frederico, the friendlier, chattier, and otherwise more amorous individual nearly impossible to disagree with if only because you desperately wanted to remain friends with him.

This personality shapeshifting was among a long list of traits which made Mr. Barbosa a formidable Diplomacy opponent.

Diplomacy offers the nearly insurmountable challenge of navigating six other humans, each with non-aligning end-goals to your

own, each with varying levels of skill and approach and style, without which the game would not be engaging.

Diplomacy mirrors life. Many people don't like playing Diplomacy because it requires them to fight, to deceive, to wrestle with difficult people. Let them go play dice or read the paper, where their fate is determined by chance and their freedom given up to the actions taken by other agents.

Meanwhile, a Diplomacy *player* relishes each of the plentiful categories of problems he may face. Positional, relational, strategic. Usually all three. He manages reversals of fortune only a bad gambler might have predicted. No matter how bleak or blissful a position, the Diplomacy player seeks to improve it.

Like so many of the virtues, we need not over-justify playing a game like Diplomacy. Playing it and doing so with one's full energy and attention is justification enough.

We will certainly return to philosophy, however we must enter into a discussion of Scoring and following that—Opening Theory—so that new players have sufficient understanding to join in this game of power politics with us.

The Score

Depending on the scoring system under which you are playing, your strategy should differ. This comment is agnostic of your *personal* preferences for draws and solos. The various amateur rulebooks I came across in my travels were vague on drawing and winning conditions.

Even with Frederico's tendency to solo, he favored draw-based scoring or systems like Janus which provided a survival incentive. Perhaps this increased his own chances of soloing, the maestro that he was.

Meanwhile, Mr. Barbosa leaned toward sum-of-squares and solo-or-bust styles of scoring.

I didn't mind much which scoring system I played with, so long as it was clear to all participants which scoring system we used, and that at least most of them had agreed to it in advance. This way players can take on a strategy that suits not only their personal style of play, but also the nuances of their Great Power and the scoring system they will be measured against.

While some scoring systems seem to encourage livelier play than others, the meaning of *lively* can always be disputed.

As always, even when I disagreed with Frederico—or Mr. Barbosa—he moved ahead my thinking. Here's one thing in which we agreed: Given how decentralized the spread of Diplomacy has been, I would not be surprised to see innovations in how to measure a diplomat's success over the board. In addition to a designer capable of visually expressing the game we'd come to know as Diplomacy, we sought mathematicians and strategists eager to draw vectors along dimensions of survival, collaboration, and dominance.

Opening Theory

Frederico long encouraged me to draw up a primer for new players relating to Opening Theory. It was not uncommon, however, to find in the same conversation the shapeshifting Mr. Barbosa argue against exactly this pursuit: “Let new players play the game—and learn the game they will!” (Where Frederico was poetic, Mr. Barbosa was direct.)

I too shared this complex and contradictory position, and in writing what follows I accept the tradeoffs.

Notation

First, a small but crucial point about notation. New players will have to write orders clearly, to be understood by the gamemaster. (Of course, one can write a sloppy or outright incorrect order as a way of weaseling out of a commitment.)

Diplomacy notation is easy to understand once you’ve learned it. I’ll be using the following in this book:

MOVE

A Mar - Spa (indicates army in Marseilles Move to Spain)

F Ank - BLA (indicates fleet in Ankara Move to Black Sea)

SUPPORT

A Par - Bur

A Mar S Par - Bur (indicates army in Marseilles **Supports** the Move of Army in Paris to Burgundy)

The order *A Par - Bur* should also be written for the above Support order to be valid.

CONVOY

A Pic - Wal

F ENG C Pic - Wal (indicates F in English Channel Convoys the army in Picardy to Wales)

The order *A Pic - Wal* should also be written for the above Convoy order to be valid.

HOLD

A Mun H (indicates the army in Munich holds position)

The Basics

Strategies and approaches to the Opening vary. Here are merely a handful of theoretical points upon which Frederico and I agreed.

Though I've been slow to call attention to it, you have probably noticed my use of male pronouns. By no means is Diplomacy for men or best played by them. In fact, Frederico sent me a letter in the Autumn of 1906 describing a game he organized with seven—yes, seven—women. “I was the gamemaster, nothing more,” was how he ended his letter. I actually believe him.

Having mentioned this apropos of nothing, let us carry on with the basics in which Frederico and I agreed regarding the early game.

Gain Neutral Supply Centers

Any sound strategy includes a plan to collect neutral supply centers. Some neutrals seem to be the *natural* neutrals of various powers. Consider Spain and Portugal for France. Norway for England. Holland and Denmark for Germany. Serbia for Austria. Bulgaria for Turkey. Which Great Power is missing from this list? That's right: Russia. Despite beginning the game with four units, the Bear has no guarantees of supply center growth in 1901.

Other neutrals are more contested. Belgium could be French, English, German, or remain neutral. Indeed, Belgium is often correctly used as a bargaining chip to seal collaboration between two out of the three Western powers against the other.

Once gained, Belgium is not necessarily easy to hold. This attribute holds for neutral centers like Greece, Rumania, and Sweden as well.

Avoid Ruin

Under few circumstances should your orders put you at serious risk of ruin. If you learn through the grapevine that England is planning to order F Lon - ENG (with 100% probability), then Mr. Barbosa and I see little alternative to ordering F Bre - ENG.

A possible exception to this thinking is while playing as Austria. Of course, versions of the Hedgehog ensure survival till at least 1902, not all continuations give Austria the appropriate leverage or position to combine with neighbors in mutually profitable ways. To provide an example, it may be necessary to risk an Italian stab in order to position units to work with or against either of Russia or Turkey. If the Italian incorrectly stabs, then it was going to be a difficult game anyway.

Create Relationships

Mr. Barbosa and I went back and forth about not only what sort of relationships to create, but also how to manage them. But we both agreed that they should be created.

With relationships come expectations, modes of communication, and the sharing of information. Even in contentious or outright antagonistic relationships, expectations are set, communication occurs (however little), and information passes back and forth.

As you react to developments around you and sew the seeds of your own flourishing, the creation and management of relationships is paramount to early game success.

Find a Way to Flourish

Flourishing in Diplomacy is found in myriad ways. The successful diplomat gains neutrals, avoids ruin, and establishes some manner of cooperation with one or more neighbors, such that he can enter the mid-game. Once there he will use his position's strategic leverage and his diplomatic skill to continue advancing his interests.

Turkey

Frederico, preferring to be at the absolute center of influencing play, and soaking up attention like sunbathers in Marseille, didn't much care for Turkey. He described it thus: "Bland at best."

And yet, despite this disdain, I witnessed Mr. Barbosa work his magic toward big draws and decisive victories.

Take heed as the "quiet corner position" to which Frederico turned down his nose is certainly nothing to sneeze at.

1901

With concentrated home centers in Con, Ank, and Smy, the Turkish homeland is relatively easy to defend for even sustained sieges. A four-center Turk with, say, a fleet in BLA, a fleet in AEG, and armies in Bul and Con is as formidable a rock as any four-center power.

"But you ought not merely aim to survive," Mr. Barbosa reminded me in my earliest games in control of the Turkish units. "Where is your fifth center coming from?" (This, conveniently, is a useful question for Italy.) Will your fifth center be Greece, Rumania, Sevastopol? Which *should* it be? When is the best moment to annex it?

Mr. Barbosa played four openings with Turkey.

The Balkan Concentration

A Con – Bul

A Smy – Con

F Ank – BLA

This opening picks up the neutral supply center Bul (just as all the following will), and A Smy - Con means Con will be able to support Bul in the fall (even if Russia and Austria aim a supported attack against it). You will have your build.

Meanwhile, you likely bounce with Russia in BLA or take it yourself if Russia plays the Southern Opening, with F Sev – Rum.

Mr. Barbosa in this way kept relationships with each of his neighbors viable. From here, he preferred to use Bul to support an Austrian attack on Rumania, either from Serbia or Budapest. This approach had multiple advantages.

The first, that it angled for a Turkish-Austrian alliance that Mr. Barbosa might exploit to his benefit later.

Secondly, such a maneuver often kept Russia from gaining Rumania and limited him to 1 or 0 builds (depending on Germany's action or inaction toward Sweden). Russia would certainly not appreciate the Turk's providing of assistance to Austria, but he needn't be completely averse to working with Mr. Barbosa going forward.

Finally, in situations where Italy was keen to disrupt or even attack Austria in Fall 1901, Mr. Barbosa could tip off Italy to the forthcoming Austrian orders. Perhaps Italy could even take Trieste or deny the Austrian fleet in Albania from securing Greece. This series of events might demonstrate to the Russian that he might yet have a friend in Turkey, given that the Russian by end of Fall 1901 is likely in Galicia and prepared to leverage that position to Austria's detriment.

"Where are you going to build?" Frederico asked one Turkish player in a game I observed where he played as Germany. It was the only

question he asked the Sultan in Fall 1901 negotiations.

Where indeed? The most obvious place would seem to be Smyrna. The most obvious unit, a fleet, which will then set sail to the Aegean Sea, possibly to be bounced by an Austrian or Italian fleet. In some games, where Italy and Austria are aligned, this defensive posture is necessary to keep Con and Smy safe. If you remain steadfast, perhaps you could turn either of the Italian and Austrian against the other. Or, at some point, the French may sail east and give you the releasing of naval pressure you need to break out of the corner.

Another straightforward option might be a build of Fleet Ankara. The situation may call for the taking of the Black Sea and a push into either Sev or Rum.

Speaking of Russian antagonism, the following openings are less friendly toward the Russian than the Balkan Concentration.

The Crimean Crusher

A Con – Bul

A Smy – Arm

F Ank – BLA

With the Armenian army, immediate pressure is put on Sev. As a result, Russia is made to work harder to secure Rumania.

In a letter from Mr. Barbosa about a game he'd played this way, Mr. Barbosa wrote about his confident negotiations with each of his neighbors. Russia pleaded for Rumania; Austria offered to help keep Russia out of Rumania; Italy asked for support into Greece. Having involved Italy in persuading the Russian to leave Sev open for a build of his own, Mr. Barbosa swindled his way into Sev from Arm. (The Russian opted for F BLA - Rum and A Ukr S BLA - Rum to secure Rum, and so gave up BLA to Mr. Barbosa's F Ank - BLA.)

It was a dream start, 2 builds from Bul and Sev, all too common for

the masterful Frederico. He built a fleet and an army and carried on into a steady mid-game and eventually stabbed Austria for the solo.

Ship of the Desert

A mountaineer, storm-stained and brown
 from farthest desert touched the town
 And, striding through the town held, up
 Above his head a jewell'd cup.
 He put two fingers to his lip,
 He whisper'd wild, he stood a-tip,
 And lean'd the while with lifted hand,
 And said, "a ship lies yonder dead,"
 And said, "Doubloons lie sown in sand
 along yon desert dead and brown,"

—Joaquin Miller 1875, The Ship in the Desert,
 Roberts Brothers' version.

A Con – Bul
 A Smy – Con
 F Ank – Arm (!)

Yes, your fleets can move along coastlines. And yes, you needn't always play F Ank - BLA by default.

As with the Crimean Crusher opening, similar pressure is put on Russia to fulfill early game expectations of gaining Rum while maintaining Sev.

Openings like this play to Frederico's flair and he was especially good at explaining his motives in numerous ways to his various opponents. With novelties comes the advantage of neighbors more open to nuanced explanations which serve your own interests more than theirs.

Tactically, F Arm provides the same threat to Sev with the bonus option of playing F Arm - BLA in Fall 1901 to either take BLA or cut support there depending on the Russian's play. In most cases, Russia's only guaranteed orders to take Rum will be to send the fleet. The best outcome could be to see Russia's fleet land in Rum, a Russian army blocking a build in Sev (hedging against F Arm - Sev), and the success of F Arm - BLA.

From here, you can straightforwardly build F Smy and already be quite secure. Alternatively, you might build an additional army-to advance through Arm into Sev by Fall 1902—or F Ank to placate either of Austria or Italy.

The Turkish Hedgehog

A Con – Bul

A Smy – Arm

F Ank – Con

Any variation of F Ank - Con in Spring 1901 can vibrate alarm bells across all of Europe, but the Turkish Hedgehog combines F Ank - Con with A Smy - Arm. The army in Armenia should be used as a diplomatic fact to dampen the signals of a Juggernaut (Russo-Turkish alliance).

Conveniently, such an opening *could* be used as the beginning move order to a Russian-Turkish alliance. Mr. Barbosa was not fond of the alliance, especially from the Turkish side.

With the Armenian army, the Turk puts Russia to a similar test as has already been discussed. "But look closer," Mr. Barbosa urged me. Then I saw the following:

Fall 1901:

A Bul - Rum

A Arm - Sev

F Con - BLA

This continuation makes it very difficult indeed for the Russian to gain Rumania. More difficult than any other opening. (Unless of course, he is already there with Spring F Sev - Rum.)

Further, Turkey has the option to sail into the Aegean with F Con - AEG without contest. Whether you make plans with Italy, Austria, or Russia, your units are well placed to find leverage some kind of near-term alliance and quite possibly your fifth build in 1902 or 1903.

Beyond 1902

Turkey's game can be quite strong with only 5 or 6 centers. With fleets in AEG and BLA, Turkey can mobilize armies into southern Russia or the Balkans via convoy as well as defend comfortably. To win, Turkey will likely have to break through into StP or perhaps Portugal.

Frederico's Choice

"Armenia, with army or fleet, if over-used by yours truly, is altogether under-utilized by the general population."

Russia

I enjoy playing Russia almost as much as Frederico.

Why? The Russian must stay as busy as any diplomat in the early years. To begin with, he is arguably playing as two separate powers of two centers each. Opponents, though, will not cease to remind him he has four units at his disposal, or five or six after 1901. But even a six-center Russia is not overwhelmingly strong after 1901 and will have much to do.

While discussing with Mr. Barbosa Russia's ability to build fleets on both sides of the primary stalemate line (from Saint Petersburg to Spain), our conversation often led back to the merits of scoring systems and the merits of each Great Power within them. From our observation, Russia may not perform quite as well as expected in non-timebound draw-based systems, but would perform quite well in time bound sum-of-square, dominance, or solo-based scoring measures.

When I did, I too was quite pleased to draw Russia, knowing if I maintained good relationships with at least a couple of my neighbors that I'd be able to prepare myself for fast growth and a possible solo.

1901

"Request Sweden with the overture of friendship." This was all Frederico would recommend me prior to my first game as Germany. It soon became clear that I could ask for Sweden and explain to Germany that the build would be used in the South. He, naturally, didn't need me meddling with him with something like F

Swe - Bal and by allowing me into Sweden, I'd be happy to refrain from the Baltic...until later.

As for Rumania, I struggled to find a plan that worked as smoothly as the German-Russian arrangement.

Except in rare situations where Austria desired to combine against Bulgaria in Fall 1901, I preferred not to open with F Sev - Rum (this allowed Turkey into BLA). Instead, my default became to play F Sev - BLA while suggesting the Turk open F Ank - Con. "You can always fight later," said Frederico of this approach, "but at least there is the possibility of Russo-Turkish cooperation." Seldom have I found Turk's very willing to play this way without also opening to Armenia as a hedge, but it is worth a shot.

The lovely thing about Russia's numerous openings is that many of them may be transposed into several strong continuations, no matter your Spring diplomacy.

Where you eventually build in Winter 1901 could even further keep options open for 1902 and beyond.

Ukraine System, Southern Variation

A Mos - Ukr

A War - Gal

F Sev - BLA

F StP(sc) - BOT

A Mos - Ukr (and its variants) is flexible, setting Russia up for the neutral Sweden and Rumania. Frederico likes to suggest to Austria that A War - Gal is coming, and that A Gal - Rum (with A Ukr S Gal - Rum) is the plan for Fall 1901. By itself, the Austrian should not like to see a Russian army in Gal, but with the second part of your plan—removing that unit from Gal to reach Rum—the Austrian should be more comfortable with the Spring move. One way to

make the success of the move more likely is to stir trouble between Austria and Italy prior to Spring 1901 moves.

Livonia System, Ukraine Variation

A Mos - Lvn

A War - Ukr

F Sev - BLA

F StP(sc) - BOT

Frederico and I both agree that an outright attack on Germany with A War - Sil tends not to achieve much. However, opening to Livonia does provide viable strategic options.

In the first place, it allows for a convoy into Swe with A Lvn - Swe and F BOT C Lvn - Swe. When Germany has opened F Kie - Hol, the convoy cannot be stopped. When the German opens F Kie - Den, Russia should negotiate to allow the convoy to succeed (in exchange for a southern build). If Germany wavers, Frederico would remind him to consider Russia's alternate orders of A Lvn - Pru and F BOT - BAL. Further, if one wants to play such a game, Russia could even feign offense at the German's unwillingness to allow F BOT - Swe and announce he will be ordering F BOT - BAL. Meanwhile, assuming Germany will take the bait, Russia continues to order his convoy and encourages England to order F NTH - Den (!).

Frederico informed me in a brusque letter that establishing the fact that one is capable of such a maneuver allows for more dynamic threats in future games.

Additionally, A Lvn puts an army adjacent StP without committing it there in Spring 1901.

Northern System, The Squid

A Mos - StP

A War - Ukr

F Sev - BLA

F StP(sc) - BOT

Similar to the Octopus (A War - Gal), The Squid puts immediate pressure on England to support himself into Norway. He will only gain the neutral with your good graces or by supporting himself in with fleets in NWG and NTH. If one is content to play an anti-English game from the start, putting the idea of F Lon - ENG in the English player's mind—to defend against a possible French F Bre - ENG—is a useful ploy.

Southern System, Rumanian Variation

A Mos - Sev

A War - Ukr

F Sev - Rum

F StP(sc) - BOT

Looking for a fairly non-committal and defensive approach? Look no further than the Southern System. If one so wishes, and the Austrian is inclined, the Bulgarian Gambit—attempting to dislodge the Turkish army in Bul—may be attempted in Fall 1901.

Beyond 1902

The Tsar's game can be quite strong even without a clear early game ally. If one does find direct cooperation, Russia can secure either a

foothold in Scandinavia, the Balkans, or Turkey, entering the mid-game with 7-9 centers and everything to play for. Because Russia can build armies and fleets on both sides of the primary stalemate line, routes to a large draw or a solo are numerous.

Frederico's Choice

The lively Frederico prefers the Ukraine System, trusting his diplomacy in the north can put him in a playable position in both theaters.

And if diplomacy fails, tactical maneuvers can keep the Russian viable with even a single northern fleet.

I cannot help but share an example of this shared in a letter Frederico sent me on the eve of 1905. He described a position wherein England and France had weakened Germany and where he as Russia held a single northern fleet, desperately trying to stay relevant in Scandinavia.

Imagine this scenario, where England proceeds to attempt to capture the Russian owned and occupied Sweden. Denmark is unoccupied.

Spring 1906

England:

F Nor - Swe

F SKA S Nor - Swe

The Russian F Swe is dislodged.

Russian retreat:

BAL

Why not retreat to Den? Retreating to BAL is more defensive, in one sense. It also still borders four supply centers: Swe, Den, Kie, Ber. Also, Den cannot be held, because England will still have 2 fleets adjacent and simply order:

F SKA - Den

F Swe S SKA - Den

Fall 1906

The English player decides his best approach is to self-standoff in Den. This way he will prevent either the German or Russian from claiming it, as well as retaining his just-captured Sweden.

England:

F Swe - Den

F SKA - Den

Russia, anticipating this, orders:

F BAL S Swe - Den

Ah ha! Russia's support is successful, helping the English fleet in Sweden out of his owned supply center, retaining control of it.

"Had my maneuver not succeeded, I may have had to disband the northern fleet," never a option Frederico was fond of as it significantly reduces winning chances, "as my southern game was quite lively indeed."

Frederico lived for poetic moves such as this one. While he did not shy away from sending letters of games not going his way, the ratio of letters with a triumphant tone to a defeated tenor was impressive indeed. And every time I examined the reports and inserts of positions Frederico sent, I found a new way of optimistically approaching my own games.