**Nexus Gunboat Tournament 2020 – G7**

**Spring 01:** In this game, my opponents are AnimalsCS, calvin, BrotherBored (AKA swordsman3003), Nopetapus, teccles and TheFlyingBoat. BrotherBored is very experienced and writes about and discusses Diplomacy strategy on his blog and Discord, of which I am also a member. Him and teccles are both finalists in ODC 2019, although that is not gunboat. TheFlyingBoat appears to be fairly strong as well, while the others have fewer games I could find. I have drawn Italy, and there are probably better powers to draw in a tournament game. Italy isn’t a snowballing power that can immediately get off to a board topping start, but it should allow for intelligent strategy to grow over time.

My opening will be Ven-Pie to force France to think about Marseilles and Nap-ION. Probably Rom-Apu is the best decision, to wait and see how England develops. If England moves Lon-ENG like BrotherBored has advocated for many times in gunboat games, then I can move Apu-Ven and take Tun with a fleet. Otherwise, I can go into a Lepanto setup with ION C Apu-Tun and I probably do something like Pie S Bur-Mar to prevent France building F Mar in the winter. I feel like the best strategy for bottling France up is to prevent them from building fleets. The way I play England is based around blockading the French fleet in Brest and wait for them to crack from German or Italian incursions. Italy did a similar thing to me (playing France) in a current game where I never really got a grasp on what I needed to do.

Predictions for other players moves will be made in sandboxes and stronger reads will be discussed later, especially when they concern me directly. Here the only nonstandard guess I’ll make is that we will see Lon-ENG.

**Fall 01:**

England went for a northern opening, with Lvp-Yor and Edi-NWG while France went for the Par-Gas, Mar-Bur zigzag. Other moves went according to the book, with a completely generic eastern front. What I see from this is that the England player is not BrotherBored (people who looked at my games should also be able to guess it isn’t me) and doesn’t fear France. My guess is that France will take advantage of that. As a result, I think I am less likely to see a strong push into my territory from France, and even if they do, it could easily be a feint to catch England off guard. The standard German reaction to a northern England is to let Russia have Sweden. In the east, I expect the Balkans to be a zone of war between all three of the eastern powers. Turkey didn’t go Smy-Arm, but Russia also didn’t do something like Sev-Rum, so no alliances have formed yet.

I’m going to react by setting up for a Lepanto, and go ION C Apu-Tun. With Piedmont, I plan on Pie S Gas-Mar. The reason for this choice is to make it clear to France that Ven-Pie tries primarily to deflect against the F Mar build, while also being less likely to succeed (I would expect Bur-Mar). So a Turkey who isn’t alert won’t actually see the support if they don’t look specifically for it, while France should look at apparent holds near their border and find it. It is also a subtle warning to England that I’m not intending to push on without backup. I’m also keeping in mind that I’m showing myself to be alliance oriented early on (and plan to do so next move, all else being equal, as well with ION S Gre-AEG), which if I show proper defensive technique towards my allies will make me an unappealing target for a stab, and set me up for future stabs down the road. But I’m also showing a tendency to avoid yomi 0 moves (Pie-Mar) I don’t see are likely to succeed. That could be exploitable later. More detailed strategy concerns depend primarily on Germany and Russia. Germany could easily get 3 builds if England goes all out against Russia, and I need to see how much focus Russia extends to the south to have a sense for how hard I want to Lepanto. If Russia is weak in the south, I do need to avoid empowering Austria needlessly.

**Winter 01:** England blocked Germany from getting 3 builds by convoying to Belgium and taking Norway with the fleet. France moved as I expected and now cannot build in Marseilles. Russia set up to fight Austria by taking Rumania with an army while Turkey sent a signal for an Austria-Turkey alliance by supporting Albania to Greece (a token gesture). This suggests that Turkey’s next target should be Rumania. I think Russia’s position has improved the most, since England’s decision to convoy to Belgium should leave the German unhappy and more likely to stay allied to Russia, and leaves England with another non-Russian front to worry about. Russia should also see that Turkey is not a friend, but Turkey has to respect the Lepanto by building F Smy. Anything else gives me a free attack, and I think Austria and Russia will be happy to weaken a dangerous neighbor. The obvious build for me is F Nap. If Turkey builds F Smy, I will support Gre-AEG and go Nap-TYS. This allows me to convoy Tun-Nap/Rom if the support into AEG is unsuccessful, which gives me more armies to defend against possible Austrian aggression. And if Gre-AEG happens, the Austrian fleet is one territory further away from my home centers, and the Austrian should support me into EAS in the fall.

I predict that England is going to have a tough time with at least two and possibly three fleets built in the north (Brest, Kiel and possibly St. Petersburg nc).

**Spring 02:** All builds went as predicted, except Turkey built A Ank, which is consistent with an anti-Russia strategy, but doesn’t put any fleet presence into EAS or AEG. My guess is that an experienced Austria would prefer to kill off Turkey before Italy, especially seeing the lack of respect for the Lepanto. If Turkey wanted to attack Russia from the start, why didn’t they move Smy-Arm? I feel like if I cannot Lepanto here, then the Lepanto is not a viable opening strategy. So the moves will be ION-EAS, Nap-ION, Tun H, and Pie-Ven (as a slight hedge against Austria).

My prediction are that France, Germany and Russia will probably focus on England. France will probably try to convoy into Wales and fight for Liverpool as a strategic objective, Russia will take Norway while Germany will focus on conquering NTH and Belgium. As Russia, I would probably support efforts to kill Turkey, perhaps even supporting Austria into Bulgaria. You take Norway, hope to claim Ankara and hope to have enough armies to keep the Austrian at bay (or hope that they attack Italy after Turkey is dead). Austria can take Venice this year, but then you are shoehorned into an Austrian-Turkish alliance, and such alliances work out better for Turkey in the long run. I cannot see an experienced player building A Ank, but perhaps I will be proven wrong by results.

After reading BrotherBored’s comments on two Austrian solo wins he had, I am going to change my move order and delay the Lepanto by a season (convoying to Apulia instead). This both protects Venice and forces Austria to make a decision about attacking Turkey before I do. Besides, I can’t take Smyrna in the fall anyway, so having an army in Syria at once won’t help.

**Fall 02:** Germany was the big benefactor for the Spring prediction game, going for a surprise push against Russian Sweden while also claiming Belgium, while France and England were kept in relative gridlock over ENG. This threat of German aggression to Sweden might suggest that Russia shouldn’t be too quick to build a third fleet. In the east, Austria showed what they thought about the Turkish moves and promptly moved east into AEG, while also claiming Galicia. My army in Venice now puts Austria in an uncomfortable position, which is good. I don’t want Austria getting too big too fast. Turkey now probably feels betrayed by Austria, so perhaps that will help me take Turkish centers. I have to hope that Germany goes west after taking Sweden and Russia disbands their fleet, because southern Russia keeps my neighbors honest. Also my moves either suggest general paranoia or a continued tendency for higher level yomi (the “obvious” move IMO was the one I originally sent in).

Let’s talk for a moment about the two major threats to my territorial integrity. The first one is the situation where Austria gets builds and I don’t, and they have armies in Vienna and Trieste after the winter and go for Tri S Vie-Tyr followed by Tyr S Ven-Tri. This seems to be the typical structure for an Austrian stab (at least from BrotherBored). I can defend against this type of stab by having two units at home protecting Venice. Pie-Ven in the spring is designed to guard against Austria accepting the Turkish alliance and getting a free build from Italy by Tri-Ven, which could retreat to Rome in the fall if needed. In this setting, Austria’s units are out of their home centers and they shouldn’t get two builds. So there is a chance that I will have more freedom to convoy to Syria in the spring and take Smyrna in the fall of 03.

The other threat is France. France doesn’t have good options for a next build, with German armies bearing down and an English army stuck in England. The most natural places to look for one are Liverpool and Tunis. So a French player might convoy to North Africa in the fall to prepare to take Tunis in 03. But that could easily lose Burgundy to Germany because of the three German armies. Plus, France has to get units out of their home centers to build, and that is not straightforward if I have A Pie, for instance. My guess is that France needs to ally with England temporarily to fight Germany and give England the freedom to convoy the army into the mainland, which makes the French attack on Liverpool stronger.

The moves I will make are setting up for Lepanto, moving a fleet into EAS, moving the army back into Pie now that Austria has retreated from my border and trying to take Smyrna and decide what to do with the next build. If France is still gridlocked, I might immediately go after them and just keep two units in the east. Probably one army and two fleets can apply the French attack, where the fleets move to WES and LYO with A Pie, and I can either attack Spain or Marseilles with support.

**Winter 02:** My strategy seems to have been successful on the surface. Austria made concessions to Russia by moving out of Galicia, which makes me safer, because to stab me, Austria will be quite vulnerable to Russian counter pressure. Plus, France moved north into ENG with their second fleet and can’t forcibly take Tunis next year. Germany is looking like the BrotherBored candidate of the game, successfully reading England not trying for Holland, and therefore being able to send full force into Burgundy rather than needing to double bounce in Holland.

Since Russia and Austria are joining in in carving up Turkey, the final arrangement will probably look something like Austria takes Constantinople, Russia takes Ankara, and I get Smyrna. Then I will hope that Austria respects my capability to keep the West from blowing out of control in favor of a rampant Germany and chooses to fight Russia afterwards, while I will focus on trying to claim French centers. If Russia wins the war against Austria, I might be able to stab them and take centers like Trieste and Greece. I probably prefer Russia to be strong rather than Austria once Turkey dies, because I have more expansion room in that setting. The big question of the winter is whether Germany will build a third fleet. If they do, I expect to see a truce with Russia while the focus becomes taking NTH and gaining more position in France (such as Picardy and Paris). I probably want to see France and Germany get stalemated while Turkey dies, so I can actually make gains in France. Germany getting Marseilles or Iberian centers is a disaster for me.

**Spring 03:** Austria built in Vienna while Germany built two armies, neither in Berlin. To me that looks like the goal is to make a truce with Russia, leave England in a low supply center state while grinding France down. One thing that strikes me is that Germany might plan on moving an army into Piedmont to flank France. I can’t really allow that because that negates my ability to take French centers in the future. If Germany offers me Marseilles, I’ll take it, because then I can use the build to make a second army which defends my northern front, whereas a Smyrna build is most naturally a fleet for pressuring France. But from one perspective, the possibility of Mun-Tyr is good for me because it dissuades Austrian aggression. Austria has absolutely no reason to be in Tyr, so if there is a bounce, I become doubly aware of hostile intent.

The Kiel army is probably headed to Holland to ward off English tricks. My suspicion is the first attempt at a German front will be to get into Picardy and try to lock down all the French home centers. If that is the case, I can stalemate the West for a while by not attacking France. Then Germany will have a hard time making all the armies count. It is hard to see where their next center will come from if not Paris, because an attack on England is not feasible. The best plan is probably to force Germany to bribe me by holding in Piedmont. With my other moves, I think I will convoy into Syria. I don’t actually mind a bounce as if Austria turns around, my army would be ready. Plus it gives me a false sense of predictability.

I’m going to predict that Germany tries to help Russia get F StP/nc to Norway. Having an extra fleet will make a difference to an offensive against England. I don’t think France will go for Tunis yet, because the armies are too important for defense. It is more likely that we see some push towards Liverpool. If Austria takes Rumania this turn, then maybe I can try to make a claim on another Turkish center or Greece for purposes of parity. Or perhaps Austria will let me destroy their fleet to build an extra army.

**Fall 03:** Pretty much the entire turn was one large stalemate, with the exception of England knocking France out of the English Channel. Germany kept the peace with England, supporting both NTH and Norway. I don’t think Germany can be patient forever though, because Russia cannot be friendly and should be looking for centers to claim. If they can’t claim Ankara or Norway, they either have to attack Austria or go after Germany, while German armies are in the wrong places to defend against Russia. I didn’t make it into Syria (Turkey made a sensible defense) and Russia didn’t help Austria into Constantinople. The issue is that Austria has 6 centers, Russia has 5 and I have 4. I can’t help Austria until I have Smyrna under control, and in some cases I will consider prioritizing helping Russia to Ankara over helping Austria, because a strong Russia keeps Austria honest. Similarly, the pressure on France from England and Germany is keeping France from attacking me in my opinion. With enemy units further away, convoying an army into North Africa and conquering Tunis would be reasonable. In this board state, France can’t even free up home centers to build. This is why my army is in Piedmont.

France supported me this turn, it is more symbolic than anything and they could easily try for a stab in the future. I am going to support France back as a signal to Austria. I will essentially say, if I am not given Smyrna, I will consider backing away from France and into positions that threaten you. While I fully intend to support Austria into Constantinople if I am supported into Smyrna. If Austria supports me into Smyrna, I plan on going to war with France and trying to collapse their position. The current friendship with France if this doesn’t happen could motivate Germany to try and slide an army into Piedmont, however. That always needs to be kept in mind. My shown tendencies would be to block Venice in case of Mun-Tyr, so maybe I can save a season by moving Ven-Tyr myself.

**Winter 03:** From the last sequence of moves, I consider the BrotherBored candidates eliminated down to two, France or Germany. Even though Turkey has had a good year for guesses, I don’t believe that the year 1 choices were strategically sound. Austria has made me quite unhappy by trying to convoy themselves into Smyrna and supporting a move into Greece in the process. That’s a good way to get me to focus on taking Trieste as my fifth center. The message to me is that Austria plans to lock me out of Turkey and won’t compensate me by giving up Greece. If Serbia had supported Apulia into Greece, this would make some sense. Then Austria is offering me Greece for Smyrna, and I would accept that. Austria could even try to be deceptive and fake this offer, hoping I support them into Smyrna next season, while not giving up Greece. That seems a lot smarter to me than the chosen action.

There is an argument that I have not been trying to optimize my convoys to be successful. This is true. Against these Austrian moves, I would much rather have my army in Apulia than Syria, because Austria is not behaving like an ally. Additionally, Turkey caught Russia napping and stole Sevastopol with F BLA. I don’t understand why Russia supported Rumania with one unit (which couldn’t stop a fully supported Austrian attack) rather than support Mos-Sev. In the west, France was the positional winner, having managed to get a fleet into Picardy while successfully guessing England wouldn’t try for Brest. That is an interesting guess for sure, although in my sandbox, I had England going for a supported attack on Belgium. From Germany’s moves, it looks like they didn’t anticipate English aggression, as they went for Hol-Bel-Pic. I don’t think that was an effective move order, and it just tempts England to be aggressive. As a result, I’m starting to like BrotherBored as France more. A French BrotherBored is reasonable news for me, because I can then expect France to defend like a maniac and most likely attack England as a priority, with Tunis being the only overlap in the standard French winning plan and my territories (assuming I don’t go after Marseilles, Spain and Portugal). So I need to be on the lookout for times where France could think that they might steal Tunis in a risk free manner. Bringing EAS back to ION is a start at dissuading such ambitions.

I expect Turkey to build F Smy, and I would love to see A Smy.

**Spring 04:** Turkey built F Smy, which makes more sense from an offensive standpoint than an army.With so many eastern centers weak, it is time for me to attack Austria. If Austrian armies succeed in their endeavors, they will be far away from protecting Trieste. I am putting in an ambitious twist by moving EAS-Smy. This maximizes the chance that an Austrian army makes it into Constantinople. The downside is that if Austria hard counters me and moves AEG-ION then Naples belongs to them. But AEG-ION seems extremely unlikely. Of all the targets on the board (including Rumania, Constantinople and Venice), I can’t imagine Austria is thinking about Naples or Tunis right now. I can only tip my hat off to an Austrian that shows such anticipation. Also, if France convoys to North Africa from Gascony, that would also be a seriously ambitious move and worthy of respect if France can both defend and pick off Tunis. I think that my mentality has been to prioritize defense, so I’m not sure if either France or Austria would expect EAS-Smy. A clever Germany might also try Mun-Tyr to try and keep the central power glue functioning, as I don’t think this stab wouldn’t be obvious to a strong player. But if you don’t take some risks, you aren’t going to claim centers, and so far my plan of looking for cooperation from others has not been successful.

Also, on a second glance, the Turkish decision to take Sevastopol with a fleet looks weird. It is true that keeping an army in Armenia helps defend if I had convoyed into Syria, but Constantinople is a lot weaker, and Russia can easily reclaim Sevastopol, for example from Rumania. This is another reason for why I am stabbing right now. There is no better chance for Austria to hoover up more supply centers than at this point in the game. From a strategical standpoint, Turkey might have seen this and understood that showing weakness could lead to disintegration of the alliance structures (as we are seeing). Time will tell how successful it will be in the long run. But my hope is that Austria takes Constantinople with my help but cannot defend Trieste. That weakens both Austria, and Turkey.

My guess is going to be that France plays defense until England gets fed up and goes after German centers. That is yet another reason for my timing, because it has to be done before France feels safe to extend outside of their borders. I think Russia will take Sevastopol from Rumania and then maybe begin to remobilize towards Austria, especially if Austria takes Rumania. A combined Italian-Russian collapse on Austria would be quite glorious. I don’t see the rest of the board making many moves, so if things go well, then both Turkey and Austria will be much worse and I will have chances for more Austrian centers in the future. Essentially I want to reach a stable position in the east and then think about Marseilles and Iberia again.

**Fall 04:** A picture can say more than a thousand words about the outcome of the past season:

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Being predictable, and not playing in an alliance oriented fashion can lead to situations like this. One also cannot discount that this is a tournament game, where being the board top is almost a necessity to advance. If Austria shows that they want all of Turkey, then they cannot be surprised that those who were also looking at Turkish centers will turn elsewhere in the face of that naked ambition.

Let’s look at the risks in the position for Italy. France is playing a defensive game, but they might also see a wide open Tunis. My hope is that France realizes that they cannot spare two units to capture and hold onto Tunis, or they take Tunis only after I secure another Austrian center. Then I can come back to reclaim it. I’m not sure either if France wants to bother me from a strategical standpoint. Making all of your neighbors hostile to you bears some risk, but France may consider other alternatives to be even more grim. I am more worried about German intervention in my Austrian war. The most natural way to press on is Tyr, ADR S Ven-Tri, since then I build A Ven, and Tyr S Tri-Vie, ADR S Ven-Tri in Spring 05. But it will backfire horrendously if Germany decides to move Mun-Tyr, and some Germans believe that a healthy Austria is needed for maximum security. Also, Mun-Tyr is natural from the perspective of getting into Piedmont. So I cannot discount the German making such a decision, which is why I will go for the guaranteed build with Tyr-Vie, ADR S Ven-Tri. Austria cannot protect both Vienna and Trieste. The other critical question is what Austria decides to do on the other flank. I really hope that I see AEG, Bul S Con H, which completely vindicates my strategy if it happens, because then Turkey will have a very tough time profiting from the dissolution of the Austrian home centers. A stronger move set in my opinion is AEG-ION because that makes it easier for France to move south. A vindictive Austria would make such a move, while a greedy Austria will hold onto Constantinople. I also hope that Russia will jump into Galicia now and set sights on Budapest, because the more that join in, the greater the chance of Austria’s eventual destruction.

Other moves we could see: NTH-Hol, with ENG S Bel-Pic, would be a stab in the same style as my own. But I’m not sure how ready England is for a war with Germany. Germany can easily support Russia into Norway and put pressure on England. Russia might also go StP/nc-BAR in order to make a northern build after reconquering Sevastopol.

**Winter 04:** When it rains, it pours. Austria seemed to be utterly shellshocked by my attack and managed to find the fourth best choice for F AEG. I think AEG-ION is the best move to try and hold back Italy because of my western vulnerabilities and the uselessness of F EAS for further attacking. If you want to make a stand in Turkey, you can order AEG S Con H, and then you will not lose a unit. I would have liked that (as Italy) because that maximally weakens Turkey. AEG-Gre is a defensive move that semi anticipates EAS-ION and tries to hold on as a Balkan nation while giving up Constantinople. The actual decision made, Con S AEG-Smy reeks of greed and ambition, and had little chance of success. In addition, it has secured the loss of Trieste next year, as I build A Nap and convoy into Albania, which Austria cannot protect while also defending Trieste, since their fleet is not in Greece. I can understand the Austrian decision, because it maximizes the chance of having a playable position if things go well. Maybe Italy sends Tyr S Ven-Tri and Germany cuts it, or Turkey for some reason doesn’t attack Constantinople from Smyrna. But the odds were against it, and that is perhaps part of the beauty in my attack, that I managed to get Austria invested in Turkish territory too, kind of like Willy Wonka giving the kids in the chocolate factory exactly what they believed they desired.

In other news, Russia went for an anti-Turkish play with Sev-Arm and Ukr S Mos-Sev. This is decent news for me. I expect Russia will build A War and take Budapest next year, which is a semi-shame as I might want it otherwise. But it keeps Turkey busy, which is very important. If Turkey cannot grow, then my decision to stab Austria becomes completely sound. I much prefer my chances with a large Russian than a large Turk. And I trust my judgment in these locked down positions where all players are jockeying for position without clear frontrunners. The German also ignored Tyrolia and continued to push in one direction into the French line. However, now the pressure is seriously on France, because England pulled off a nice outflanking of France by ENG-IRI, NTH-ENG. France has a defense, which is Pic-ENG with support by MAO. But that really ties France down so far that they cannot even dream of aiming for Tunis, especially now that my fleet is in ION. England probably lets Germany into Picardy next season and then aims to take MAO in the fall. But there are chances for a German stab of England now that NTH is empty. A nice facet of my decision to not attack France currently though is that Germany can attack England only at the cost of relieving some pressure off France (from the English fleets). This makes the western front a drawn out battle, which is what Russia and I, as the likely victors on the eastern front, desire. Germany-Russia-Italy would be a nice positional battle of powers towards the endgame.

**Spring 05:** Let’s begin by assessing the west. France’s fleet in Picardy is out of position, so England can now claim MAO this turn. The defense which makes this most difficult for England would be MAO S Pic-ENG, which is made in anticipation of ENG S IRI-MAO. The downside of this is that France has to think about both covering Brest and making sure that F Pic is not destroyed by Germany. I guess if you are gambling on this English decision, maybe you don’t even hedge and apply a triple attack to Burgundy and pray England doesn’t convoy to Brest. That way, if you see Bel S Bur-Pic, a retreat square magically appears in Brest. In fact, you probably want Germany to dislodge Picardy in this setting, so you don’t even attack Burgundy, to maximize this chance. If IRI S ENG-MAO, then France gets into ENG and can choose between active or passive defense with the retreat from MAO (more active, but perhaps foolhardy would be MAO-NAO, passive would be MAO-Spain). From these considerations, I am very tempted thinking as England to move IRI S ENG, ENG C Wal-Bre, which obliterates this otherwise surprisingly robust French defense.

Now we can think about ways to counter this English action. That can be done by MAO S Pic-Bre, and France defends MAO consequently, unless Germany gets into Picardy and cuts Brest in the fall. France can give up Picardy to almost every natural German line by triple supporting into Burgundy, or defend against Bur S Bel-Pic by Par-Pic, Gas S Mar-Bur. The downside of this choice is that Germany can hard counter by moving Bur-Par and triple support Ruh-Bur.

Here is my assessment under the assumption BrotherBored is France. He will guess based on his analysis of the English and German playstyles. Germany seems to be playing a straightforward strategy (take Sweden, attack France, profit), and the attacking doesn’t seem to be so creative as things stand. No attempt has been made to enter Piedmont. England has also shown more of a characteristic for positional, defensive oriented play (not moving aggressively in the north towards Russia, convoying to Picardy). The natural positional idea is to conquer MAO from IRI, so that makes my first suggestion likely for France under the assumptions I have made. One of the points of this analysis is to show why I think the tactical flow is the primary process that matters. It is quite possible that my strategies are less successful because I take too many possibilities into account (like German intervention in Tyrolia). But I think smart players CAN cleverly interfere with the natural plans on the board, and they should if it nets them benefit (for Germany a healthy Austria if they believe that has value, plus Italy not showing any support of your French attack). Guessing primarily based on what you have seen is rational up to the point that your opponents understand flexibility of thought.

Now on to my moves. I am just going to follow the natural attack of ION C Nap-Alb, ADR S Nap-Alb, Vie S Ven-Tri. It is the easiest way to make headway against Austria, who can decide to fight for Trieste or for example take Rumania, given Russia will probably move War-Gal. The defense I need to be worried about is Alb-Tri (Ser/Bud S) followed by Bud S Tri-Vie. If Russia attacks Budapest with support in the fall, this will fail, but Russia may want to interfere with my growth too. Against almost any other decision, I should gain Trieste without losing Vienna, and additionally, convoying my army to Albania also looks like it is setting up to take Greece. I will estimate in the fall how likely it is for Austria to try and cut Albania, because I would prefer to keep it there rather than move it to Trieste. Turkey destroyed F BLA and should probably do something like Ank S Con, Con S Syr-Smy just in case Austria attempts to take either Smyrna or Constantinople. This is more plausible from Austria not going fully vindictive and avoiding AEG-ION last season. Russia can attempt to exploit this by moving Arm-Syr, Sev-Arm.

**Fall 05:** So the western guesses didn’t entirely pan out for me. First of all, I failed to notice a tactical vulnerability of my suggestion to make a supported attack on ENG. That is to say, if it succeeded, England could retreat to Brest. But there aren’t many natural lines that would have left ENG unprotected. Even in the variant England chose, ENG S Bel-Pic, IRI-MAO, the supported attack would not have dislodged ENG because of the cut. And France managed to guess correctly that England wouldn’t make the attack on MAO. Moreover, they improved tactically on my anti-convoy variation by not supporting Pic-Bre, as long as France preferred to keep their fleet in Picardy rather than get to Brest. Since we saw IRI-MAO, this didn’t matter. They also sent in a triple attack on Burgundy which would have refuted the Bur-Pic lines I was calculating. It didn’t matter though because Germany continued their straightforward play of moving in as solid a way as possible, without giving up any ground. Now France needs to decide whether to try and hold onto MAO or dynamically defend Paris with Bre-Pic, Mar-Bur. I think Pic S Wal-Bre would be very strong for Germany.

For my moveset, I am going to be greedy, because I see Russia moving into Budapest. My orders will be ION S Alb-Gre and Vie, ADR S Ven-Tri. As long as Russia attacks Budapest, this will not lose Vienna, and Austria would have to have some vision to imagine the idea Gre S Tri-Alb, Bul S Gre which destroys my army but fails to a quadruple supported attack on Trieste. Also, if Turkey attacks Bulgaria again without thinking, that will give me Greece, as I cannot expect to see Ser S Gre. I am much more likely to see Ser S Bud, and Bud S Tri-Vie, which as least has a chance of not losing ground if Budapest is not cut. Russia retreating from Turkey isn’t perfect for me but Turkey will take a while to set up to take Bulgaria.

**Winter 05:** Austria completely self-destructed with some inexplicable decisions. They chose to attack Vienna with support from Budapest, which is reasonable enough (hoping Russia wants to weaken Italy by waiting a turn to fight for Budapest). But then the order Gre S Ser-Alb and Bul H(!!) gave up both Budapest and Greece. Austria would have 4 centers, instead of 2 if they had ordered Ser S Bud and Bul S Gre. As a result I am now tied for the board top with Germany. I hope they will leave armies in Serbia and Bulgaria, because then I can prop Bulgaria up for as long as I need to prevent Turkey from building, while I can take Serbia at my leisure. I am now most worried about Russia, because they have a lot of armies at my door. With Austrian help, they can take Vienna. But what is nice is that Germany probably doesn’t want to interfere in favor of Russia now. Austria has been turned into a lost cause, and Turkey has not profited. This is a great strategical success. My game plan now is roughly the following:

A) Build two armies in Rome and Venice, and get them in position to protect Vienna from Russia.

B) Take Serbia by force or deception, and build a third fleet.

C) Use the third fleet to stand guard in the west against intrusion of enemy fleets, while using the other two fleets to attack Turkey.

D) Use further builds to strengthen my defensive western flank and my warfront in the east as needed. If France collapses, pounce, but otherwise leave things be. If France gets a build because England and Germany start fighting, be extremely cautious. It could easily become F Mar if I leave the west too open.

E) If the position looks like a stalemate, and I still have the board top, offer a draw. I want chaos and confusion to strike the ranks of my opponents, and one who is not in sync with the others may get attacked by neighbors for refusing a draw. Especially BrotherBored I feel will not be satisfied without a board top.

Turkey moving to BLA was nice for me (as Austria didn’t support from Bulgaria anyway) as now Russia has to worry about Sevastopol. Therefore, I expect a build like A Sev. If Austria leaves some raiders up (like A Tyr), then I will temporarily trade Vienna for Serbia if I need, and try to conquer Bulgaria too.

**Spring 06:** All builds and disbands went as anticipated. This season is about my attack plans and strategies. Elsewhere, I am guessing that things are going to be exactly the same, more or less. There are ideas that will affect the equilibrium. Germany could support Wales into Brest, England could take MAO, or Germany could stab England by moving into NTH. Germany might be tempted to do this (also supporting the convoy into Brest simultaneously would be strong, just like my attack on Austria). Germany could also help England into StP to get the fleet out of Norway. I don’t necessarily fear German growth, as even though we are fighting for board top, it moves German units away from me, makes Germany more vulnerable to Russia, and makes France continue to fear Germany, rather than try to make a break for Tunis. I am in a much better position with my armies to threaten Germany than vice versa. If England gets stabbed, it is probably an example of the principle that an English army in England is a wasted unit (taken from BrotherBored).

Under an infinite clock, what I would want to do is the following: Get fleets into AEG (to cripple Turkey) and North Africa (to protect Tunis and keep the French fleet in MAO alive without giving France the option of a tactical convoy to North Africa), don’t fight for Russian occupied centers yet and grind down the rest of Austria and Turkey. I would then become Turkey on steroids because my pieces build closer to the stalemate lines. The moves consistent with positionally crippling Turkey would be Gre S Bul (where is your fourth unit coming from, Turkey?) and ION-AEG (your fleet is in BLA, what are you going to do about this?). I then move armies north to protect Vienna and prepare to slowly and safely take Serbia, to build the fleet that protects my backside (I only need two fleets to fight Turkey, if they are crippled). This was the first implementation of my plan.

Before sending in any moves, I put my predictions for Turkey, Russia and Austria into a sandbox while keeping moves for the western powers relatively unchanged. What you notice is that Turkey has a very natural set of moves, Smy-Arm and BLA S Con-Bul. The idea is to take Bulgaria and Sevastopol again. But Turkey can only achieve that if Italy doesn’t move to AEG. From the perspective of Vienna (my weakest center), it is much stronger for me if Russia cannot move armies west because of the threat to Sevastopol. So the conclusion is that perhaps I don’t want to move to AEG yet after all, because any fall defense/offense against Russia will be much stronger if they have Turkey breathing down their back. This leads to the glacially slow idea of Gre S Bul, ION-Tun, ADR-ION. This move set tries to get to North Africa as soon as possible to increase the stalemate potential of the west while also trying to keep Turkey under lock and key at the same time. This would be a beautiful positional idea if it worked, but there is a big flaw in my opinion. Austria has two ideas. One is to accept their fate and forever send Ser S Bul, Bul S Ser. The other is to try and work with Russia against me (which makes sense from a vindictive standpoint – even though Russia took Budapest, I was the one who transformed Austria into a Balkan nation). Then Austria begins by Ser S Bul-Gre and tries to claim it. Next year, they try to move on to Trieste with Gre-Alb-Tri. They have a chance (not large, but this is a tournament match) to come back if they can reclaim a home center. The problem with ION-Tun is that it does not reinforce Greece (unlike ION-AEG), so I cannot necessarily retake it without making positional concessions elsewhere. So I need to find a strategy that counters Ser S Bul-Gre (Bul S Ser-Gre will never work because of Turkey inevitably cutting Bulgaria).

And this leads us to Russian strategy. What are their goals? They definitely do not want me to become Turkey, because that stifles their growth. So they have to aim for either Turkish centers, German centers or Vienna. Their army-heavy composition does not allow them to attack Turkey efficiently. So they would like to move west. Also, St. Petersburg could be lost to German or English fleets, which would make Russia become southern Russia (again using BrotherBored’s terminology). I think Russia is a reasonably strong player (my guess right now is teccles, but that just comes from one move way in the past where Ukraine was left open as a retreat square in case Austria went for a supported attack on Rumania). They probably want to hinder my plan of taking Balkan supply centers while simultaneously setting up to take Vienna. One strategy to try and counter my army buildup is Bud S Ser (to show friendly intention to Austria), Gal-Boh, Ukr-Gal, if they think I am going to support Vienna. This puts Russian armies where they need to be to defend against me, as there is a serious risk of me trying to outflank Russia if the Russian armies are too far south. Vie-Boh on my part to counter this would be too fancy in my opinion, as I don’t want to move there. Instead what I will do is take a risk in the south that I can overcome Turkey if I control Serbia, even if they capture Bulgaria and Sevastopol while building two fleets. Vie-Bud cuts a potential support to Serbia, while Tri S Gre-Ser, ION-Gre is a very safe attacking moveset which refutes the Austrian strategy outlined above. I could even move ADR-Alb to destroy the Austrian army, although that wastes a tempo westward compared to ADR-ION. But perhaps that isn’t bad after all, since it allows for Alb-Gre, Gre-AEG in the fall and then I just build the western fleet. Note that I can lose Vienna to a supported attack, but the moves Ven-Tyr, Rom-Ven and the retreat Vie-Boh allow me to reclaim Vienna from Trieste safely, while Russia loses Sevastopol to Turkey. This only fails if Germany moves Mun-Tyr, and for example, if Germany plans to stab England this turn, that will not happen. I don’t expect to see Bud-Tri, as that move rules out collaboration with Austria on Russia’s part. Even if that happens, then Vienna is safe.

**Fall 06:** Big news occurred in the west when England broke through MAO without Germany trying for a stab in NTH. France tried a double bounce in Picardy, probably expecting a support for the Wal-Bre convoy, either with or without the strike into NTH. Now France has to both worry about protecting Spain (MAO retreated to Portugal – Tunis was open but France would gain nothing from trading Portugal for Tunis) and guarding Paris. I note that Germany held his unit in Sweden, perhaps signaling that they are ready to hedge their bets and attack England if things remain slow. My beginnings of a snowball probably scare the western powers. I think France does a double bounce in Spain and support holds Paris, because dislodging MAO could end in the loss of a supply center.

Closer to my front, my offense worked as imagined. Austria did try to take Greece, using the less optimal arrangement Bul S Ser-Gre, which was never going to work because of Turkey. Russia conquered Vienna, but suddenly cannot defend Sevastopol anymore from Turkey, because of my choice to avoid pressing fleets into Turkey’s face. Now Russia cannot even hold onto Vienna, and should lose a unit this winter. My decision to empower Turkey is semi motivated by the fact that I think they are a weaker player than Russia, and I might be able to trick them later.

I had at least 4 different attack plans, and I am going to make the most straightforward choice, to simply retake Vienna by force (Ser-Bud cuts support). This was my original intent under these circumstances, and to justify it, I will look at the other alternatives.

First of all, I’m not considering making an attempt on Munich yet. Even though it weakens a rival, I don’t want to disturb the west until I can put up defensive fleets. Moreover, Germany might become afraid and protect Munich, and what have I gained? So lets go to my first conceivable choice, which is to take Budapest. I do that (to keep Serbia as well) by sending in Ser S Tri-Bud, Tyr-Vie, Boh-Gal. Taking Budapest I think is stronger than taking Vienna. But I think Russia could understand that. Since Sevastopol is lost anyway, what I expect to see is a move like Rum-Ser, which counters this plan. It also counters my next natural plan, which is to take Bulgaria. By the way, I don’t expect to see Bud S Rum-Ser, because giving both Rumania and Sevastopol up to Turkey seems like the wrong choice for Russia.

There are two direct methods for taking Bulgaria, where one unit of Serbia and Greece supports the other in and I backfill either with Trieste or Albania, depending on the choice. Without Russia looming so large, I would do this, because then Turkey only gets one build, and can only build one fleet. The problem is that Rum-Ser counters both plans, one by cutting support, and the other by countering a vital backfill (which costs me Serbia temporarily too). It is far more sound to have an army in Serbia than in Bulgaria without Serbian support. I also have a very devious and greedy plan for taking Bulgaria. I can order Ser S Bul-Rum and backfill Bulgaria and Greece with my fleets. This would have some chance of success, because I expect Turkey to order Bul-Rum, BLA S Ank-Sev. But the risk of Russia supporting Rumania is too great, where then my Albania fleet stays in an offside position, and now I have angered Turkey with the ploy. So I will stick to the simple offense of Ser-Bud, Boh, Tyr S Tri-Vie, Ven-Tri. Unless Germany cuts Tyrolia (which you probably wouldn’t do if you are afraid of an attack on Munich), this will retake Vienna. I can’t take Vienna from Tyrolia because of the possibility of Bud-Tri, which defends dynamically with a unit likely to be cut. I will begin to charm Turkey by supporting Bulgaria from Greece in the hope that I don’t see two fleets built in the winter.

I think Germany might stab England now and support Russia into Norway, to shore them up against me. England and France are probably going to play ultra safe on their front, with MAO S IRI-ENG. France could try to kill Burgundy now if they think my armies will distract German supports, but I think Germany will probably just defend on the French front and plan to convoy Belgium into England next year.

**Winter 06:** This turn shows the limits of my experience and vision because my momentum halted here. Russia claimed Serbia (with a strong Sev-Rum move thrown in that I completely missed and validates this plan) and Turkey chose to support hold Bulgaria, even sending in a support to Sevastopol from Armenia. I must have spooked Turkey significantly by destroying Austria so fast. Perhaps they could be afraid of a BrotherBored Italy. Germany didn’t stab England, but neither did they support Munich. Again this points to a bit of one-dimensionality in strategy. I retreated Ser-Alb on autopilot, but there is an argument that I could have a hard time getting another build and might need another fleet to defend the west. Keeping the army is more in line with playing to win though, I suspect. A third fleet won’t help me take Bulgaria, while my armies could still gain some momentum yet if there are shifts towards Russia. If I moved towards France, they would respond by giving up Paris to Germany and defending against me with their life.

I could have traded Serbia for Vienna if I had gone for my attack Budapest strategy. This would put me in a better position with respect to Greece and put Russia and Germany into closer contact. With Vienna, my positional trump is the ability to outflank Russia and start to put pressure on Warsaw. If Russia needs to react, then Turkey might be able to make progress towards Sevastopol and Rumania. Not that Turkey being big is good for me, but it increases the odds that I can get another build. Russia being in Serbia should mean that Turkey and Russia won’t fully team up against me, because Turkey wants Serbia to snowball. Also, my reaction to support Bulgaria has paid off. If I had kept Serbia, I meant it more as a trick, in a similar fashion to supporting Marseilles in F03. If I had conquered Smyrna that turn, my plan was to move west and help Austria and Russia carve up the rest of Turkey and hopefully incite conflict between them. In this setting, I anticipated Turkey going for the two builds and was hoping that the support would dissuade a double fleet build. But now I might legitimately want a Turkish ally, and I showed no treachery yet, so it isn’t out of the question. Also keep the SC count in mind. At the moment, Germany, Russia and I all have 7 centers, France has 5 and Turkey and England have 4. As long as there are no snowballs (and Turkey and Russia stopped mine for now) this is still anybody’s game. I anticipate Germany will move towards St. Petersburg now and will either look to give it to England or take it themselves. Maybe Germany provides stronger support for English moves in France in return for St. Petersburg. Russia should build A Sev, A Mos, while Turkey has to build a fleet. As long as Turkey doesn’t move out of BLA, I think I am relatively safe.

**Spring 07:** Russia seems to have a lot of faith in Turkey not trying to take Sevastopol, for how else can I describe builds of A Mos and A War? I can see that Russia wants to meet my armies head on, and possible sneak in and capture German centers, but I’m not confident at first glance that Russia can defend everything, and once I take over Budapest and Serbia, I will be hard to dislodge. My priority is to make it clear to Turkey that Sevastopol and Rumania are their most accessible supply centers. I can defend Greece against Turkey for a long time (as long as England doesn’t sneak into Tunis), and there is no way I let them into Serbia.

Let’s think about Russian strategy. Alb-Ser is the most obvious Italian move in the position (just as a means of preventing Serbia from supporting anything meaningful) unless I try Alb-Gre, ION S Gre-AEG. Therefore, supporting with Serbia seems to be out of the question. Ser-Gre, hoping for Turkish support, would be insanely ambitious, given that I did not attack Turkey the previous turn. It would make sense if I had attempted treachery though. One Russian plan is to attempt a surprise attack on Bulgaria and move Rum S Ser-Bul. This could work if Turkey orders Con-AEG, which I anticipate. The natural moves on the northern side would be Bud S Gal-Vie I think, because if I attack Budapest, I would order Boh-Gal naturally (so I wouldn’t order Gal S Bud as Russia for this reason) and it would counter an attack such as Tyr S Vie, Vie S Tri-Bud. But I think this is too risky, as it gives me Serbia, and also gives up Budapest to an attack such as Tri S Vie-Bud, Boh S Tyr-Vie. Giving up so many centers for Bulgaria is very inconsistent with Russian strategy, so I don’t expect it to happen.

The next plans would be aimed at Trieste. If Russia wants to stall and thinks I will order Tri S Vie-Bud, they can order Bud S Ser-Tri. The weakness of this line would be Tri S Alb-Ser. So the most dynamic stalling defense Russia has as far as I can tell succeeds as long as Turkey doesn’t cut Rumania, or I support move into Galicia. It would be Ser-Tri, Rum S Bud-Ser and Gal-Vie. This defends Serbia with two units, and cuts any support I could send at Budapest. I can’t see any strategy which is better for Russia, as strategies that go after Vienna don’t seem natural against the attacking ideas of Tri S Vie-Bud or Tri S Alb-Aer.

After looking at these Russian plans, I have decided on the risk minimizing strategy of trying to safely take Serbia with Turkish help. Tri S Alb-Ser and Vie-Bud prevent all supported attacks on Trieste, while Boh S Tyr-Vie defends against supported attacks on Vienna (Mun-Boh is extremely unnatural). I will also double bounce in AEG to tell Turkey to attack Russia. I am keeping in mind that this might tempt Turkey into an order such as Con S Gre-AEG, Bul-Gre in the fall.

I expect Germany will move fleets east to counter the threat of Russian armies, and France will leave Paris undefended to defend against English convoys to Spain or Brest.

**Fall 07:** In the west, France didn’t fear the convoy to Spain, and chose to defend Paris from Germany with a scissors cut and Brest from a supported convoy from England, which happened (Germany supported the convoy). Germany didn’t move fleets east though to combat Russia. Not moving Den-BAL at least seems like a mistake, with Russia getting into Silesia. Russia used the dynamic defense I had concluded they would probably apply, and Turkey backed away from Armenia, so I was not successful in capturing Serbia (Turkey would only cut Rumania in conjunction with an attack on Sevastopol or Rumania). If Turkey wants to remain a four center power, that is their prerogative. Moving Arm-Smy (instead of Arm-Ank which at least threatens a convoy to Sevastopol) is suggestive of that.

My first goal is to convince Turkey that I am not out for their blood (yet). This is what my bounce in AEG should suggest, and I hope Turkey will get the message. I sent another message by offering a draw. I didn’t think this would have a high chance of ending the game, and the tournament situation made that extremely clear with results from the morning. First of all, out of the first four finished games, two have ended in solos. This suggests to the experienced players that it is close to being solo or bust to get into the finals. Secondly, TheFlyingBoat lost in one of the solos, so they definitely need a good result. The mentality they showed in the comments suggests that they have to be all-in for this game. I suspect that TheFlyingBoat is either England or Russia, since taking no risks as Turkey is nonsense for them. I think a stronger player would have tried more things from the German position. The final thing I want to clarify with my draw offer is that I am not BrotherBored. Therefore, people and feathered birds alike should not need to pathologically fear me. If they understand why I attacked Austria (the Smyrna convoy is the worst type of signal to send to Italy) then they should be able to see how things are different in the present.

Now I need to make my orders consistent with offering a draw. My choice will defend against every option except for Con-AEG and Sil S Gal-Boh. I will send Vie-Gal (to cut Gal S Sil-Boh), and Tri, Tyr S Boh-Vie, Alb S Tri and ION S Gre, Gre S Bul. This is my claimed draw line. If Russia were to try Sil S Gal-Boh, then that could be countered by Vie S Tri-Bud, Alb-Tri (or Alb-Ser if I prefer to trade Trieste for Serbia). I think Russia might actually order Sil-Ber. Apart from Sil-Ber, I think Russia sends in the same orders. I will take note if Russia tries to hard counter my last set of orders in some way. Germany could try a very funny juke against France’s last set of orders. If they had moved Pic-Bel, the Burgundian army would have made it into Paris. France has to decide how to prioritize defending Spain, Paris, Brest and having the chance to use Germany’s insecurity to destroy the army in Burgundy. Not moving Mun-Ber would be very risky for Germany, which is why having a fleet in BAL would have been a big deal for defense. I am not going to take Munich until the endgame if it is still stalemate, or if I am already much stronger. Germany is now my buffer, as the dynamics have started to begin to turn for France and Russia again with Germany beginning to be occupied by Russia.

**Winter 07 + Spring 08:** England made the big move this season, capturing Brest from MAO while also renewing intentions against St. Petersburg. It feels to me now that the players should be arranged in the following manner:

Austria – (Nopetapus or calvin)

England – TheFlyingBoat

France – BrotherBored

Germany – (Nopetapus or calvin)

Italy – Erdmundr

Russia – teccles

Turkey – AnimalsCS

I pin Turkey as AnimalsCS because they have claimed in AAR’s to be readers of BrotherBored. The reaction to the destruction of Austria suggests a high degree of fear of victimization, since I attacked Austria according to BrotherBored’s guidelines for stabbing (make sure they stay dead). Germany has shown extreme unawareness of the danger they are in (Russia will move to Berlin at some point, and tempting me to take Munich is risky) and combined with a couple misorders, suggests that they are one of the players who I am less familiar with. I pin England as TheFlyingBoat because they are starting to speed up play, which makes sense for their tournament situation. If you want to understand why I think BrotherBored is France, look at the opening and the amount of correct guesswork during the defense so far. Weaker French players would have crumbled by now.

With France being knocked down to one fleet and England on the rise, I need to try my hardest to get a build this turn, because I need a third fleet as insurance against English or French incursions into my side of the Mediterranean (if France retakes Brest, F Mar will be built). So I have to outplay Russia now while being mindful of the Turkish treachery (last turn they tried to counter my double bouncing by supporting Gre-AEG and ordering Bul-Gre, but I saw that coming). What I absolutely don’t want to see from Turkey is BLA-Con, because then they can only attack Greece once the two Turkish fleets get out into the open. I have done my absolute best to make Rumania and Sevastopol vulnerable to Turkey (I also made Bulgaria vulnerable to Russia last fall), but they haven’t taken me up on it. That is definitely one downside to my attack on Austria, the lack of trust from others. Russia is exploiting it hard with their positioning.

Russia has shown risk aversity in their tactics (so have I, barring the turn I attacked Austria, since Tunis was extremely weak if Austria had prevented EAS-ION). I think it’s time to try to bring out the hard counters, if I can. I suspect BrotherBored might have moved to Galicia last spring and won that guess, since the analysis was all there for that. But I preferred to try and count on Turkey’s greed, which has looked misguided at the moment. But time will tell. The positional play from Russia is Sil S Gal-Boh, Ukr-Gal. This is a move order that looks to take a German center in the fall and destroy an Italian army. I think this is very reasonable because Germany has shown no intention of protecting home centers. Probably now is a good time to talk about the Scandinavian skirmishes, now that we see that England and Russia are both strong players. Stp/nc-Nwy is a move that prevents Nwy-NTH, which weakens England against a German stab. England, who had held Norway for a while, now went Nwy-StP/nc, probably because they were afraid of Stp-BAR, Sil-Ber and a build in St. Petersburg. It is also a suggestion for Germany to move fleets east.

Note that Russia’s dynamic defense from last spring cannot harm me, so I don’t care about Sil-Boh, Gal-Vie, Ser-Tri, Rum S Bud-Ser. The risk I am going to take is to leave Vienna unprotected, because I want to induce Russia to take some risks. I think I have a higher chance of success with this concept than if I just play for low risk stalemates. So Tyr S Boh, Tri S Vie-Bud, Alb-Ser. I will send Boh S Mun-Sil as a reminder to Germany that there are enemy units in their territory. Then I will double bounce AEG again because I think I can destroy the Turkish army in Greece if they repeat their strategy from last fall. I think Bud S Gal-Vie, Rum S Bud would be a remarkably strong read if it happened which I can respect, because it gives up Serbia to other lines. I think generic Italian strategy attacks Serbia here or tries to trade Bohemia for Budapest by means of Tyr S Boh-Vie. As a side note, if I thought BrotherBored were Russia, I would care more about hard counters from Russia, because that is how I think BrotherBored would plan, given what I have shown.

On second thought, after putting Turkish moves into the sandbox, I will move Gre-Bul, ION-AEG. I need to show Russia that they have to protect Serbia, which makes it harder to use Budapest offensively. I think Turkey is going to frustrate me by moving BLA-Con, Con-AEG, Smy H, Bul S Ser. I think France will give up Paris to Germany in order to try and destroy Brest and preserve MAO. England is the main risk at the moment to France surviving, because with my two fleets, I am not a naval power. I think Germany will continue to critically misevaluate the east by doing nothing, and Russia will eventually pounce.

**Fall 08:** France reclaimed Brest at the cost of Paris, but will not be able to hold onto it. I noticed that they offered a draw after these orders, which suggests they realize they almost surely cannot solo anymore. There is an argument that it is also a signal to me not to get worried if France leaves Marseilles open to rebuild their second fleet. In some cases, I might even welcome France in Tunis if we are both fighting for a draw against either Russia/Turkey or England, as I don’t have enough fleets for naval defense at the moment. Turkey is playing for the “hope Italy never gets another build” strategy with the more successful idea (compared to bouncing in AEG) of BLA-Con, Con-Smy, Smy-Syr. Now Russia is under no threat at all, which is a strong positional signal from Turkey, which Russia cannot exploit without a southern fleet. Unless I sacrifice A Boh for a fleet, Turkey is very close to having inevitability, because ION is just too weak otherwise. Turkey uses the threat of incursions into ION to get fleets in EAS and AEG, after which I won’t really be able to hold Greece much longer. However, if Turkey takes Greece with an army, it will take a while to break further, especially with so many other centers under Russian control. Turkey building a third fleet after conquering Greece feels like an offer to throw the game to Russia, as Russia must begin to think about the rest of the south if I am pushed back.

As I mention, I either need a build or Russia to destroy A Boh. Turkey putting no pressure on Russia forces my hand. Note that if I had sent Boh-Gal last turn, instead of trying to warn Germany of danger, I would have conquered Budapest because of the choice of Russian defense, with Rum S Ser, leaving Galicia as the only defender of Budapest. This is suggesting to me that my instincts are alright, but my execution has been found lacking. I did notice that Russia hedged against a Turkish surprise attack into Rumania with Ukr S Rum, but they don’t have to worry anymore. I still think Russia will move to Berlin in the fall, taking a center off a board-topping rival. I think their choice of Sil-Boh hints at this, because it isn’t really intended to work. So my plan is to choose a sequence which leaves Bohemia destructible while also giving me capturing options.

It is tempting to take Munich, but I think it is a positional mistake, and also makes me look like a backstabbing maniac, which is not my general style. I need Germany’s fleets to keep Russia and England honest, even though they are rusting in Scandinavia at this moment. Instead, I will hope that Russia thinks I am an order cycler, and retry my attack on Budapest, except this time with Boh-Gal. It shouldn’t work, since a patient Russia will just use their dynamic defense from Spring 07, but you never know. Towards Turkey, I have to make a decision about whether Turkey wants to move Smy-EAS, Smy-AEG or tries for more treachery. My natural inclination is to assume Smy-EAS will happen, which is countered by AEG-EAS. Turkey has always supported Bulgaria when it is under attack previously. If I anticipate Con S Bul, Bul S Ser, Smy-EAS, Syr-Smy, then the best move order is AEG-EAS, Gre-AEG.

If Turkey moves Smy-AEG, Con S Bul, Bul S Ser, Syr-Smy then my best choice is AEG H. This could tempt Turkey into making plays on AEG when what I am really after with my fleet having advanced so far is Bulgaria. I don’t like the situation where my fleets are in Gre and EAS and their fleets are in Smy and Con. Turkey has the positional edge there because of the extra army and my inability to threaten Bulgaria. In some cases, I would like to move Alb-Gre, Gre-ION but not being able to successfully cut Serbia is a problem. However, I would then be able to make a Turkish fleet EAS very weak by exiling it to Syria.

The last thing I need to pay attention to are extremely ambitious Turkish moves that leave Bulgaria vulnerable to show me the finger, and instead either see Smy S Con-AEG or Smy H, Con-Bul/sc, Bul-Gre. It is against these rare options that I have decided to protect myself with Gre S AEG-Bul/sc. This will infuriate Turkey if successful, and make them feel better about themselves if it fails, while trying to keep them from utilizing F Con offensively. Now I am going to sandbox and see if anything pops out from the board. The sandboxing suggested to me that even if Turkey gets into EAS this fall, then I can still defend naturally by AEG-ION, and Turkey might react incorrectly (if they want Greece) by moving EAS-AEG eventually, which keeps F Con badly developed. I think France gives up Gascony to Germany this turn in order to build F Mar, since Germany is not eliminating France without fleets. England is the existential threat. England will probably retake Brest from MAO. We will see if Russia goes after Berlin or remains patient. A thing to keep in mind with Russia is that if Russia is teccles like I think, then since they already have a solo in the bag, they might be satisfied with a board top. I will look at game 21 carefully too, since BrotherBored might be in a strong state there and could have similar plans. Finally, TheFlyingBoat posted notes to their other game, and it shows them both to be familiar with BrotherBored’s writing (their notes are closer to BrotherBored’s famous game report than these are) as well as an analytically minded player who cares about predictions. It will be interesting to see how predictable I turned out to be in the postmortem.

**Winter 08 + Spring 09:** A lot of stalemating happened on most fronts, with the exception being France holding onto Brest because England tried for a convoy. Russia was patient with Germany and went for the dynamic defense that stops all attack paths except for supported moves into Galicia. Germany becomes the supply center leader, but I think a lot of the other players don’t fear them as a result of their moves. Turkey thankfully tried for AEG which earns me an extra turn of defense. For the winter, I wasn’t sure what England wanted to disband, and I was praying Germany would do anything except A Kie. A fleet would have been best for me, but Germany built A Ber and seems to be sticking to the England alliance rigorously without threatening Russia. A Ber at least makes A Sil think about other things than encroaching on Italy. But horrible for me was England’s disband of A Wal. This gives up all hope of overcoming France and instead targets Italy for their next centers, either Tunis or even Rome or Naples. I would go so far as to say I am nearly dead as a result of this choice, having to rely on the graces of my enemies to avoid collapse. If disaster strikes, I am sure people can criticize my choice of a 5 army, 2 fleet composition. My defense is that I am playing to win, and in order to achieve that with an eastern strategy, I need armies. I wouldn’t have better luck conquering Turkey with fleets, and moving west allows Turkey to grow once more.

I wish France had gone for the defense I implicated last turn and traded Gascony in order to build F Mar. Then there would be a chance that English fleets would think twice about overextension. Here, I think it is close to 100% certain I will see MAO-WES, especially given that I think this is TheFlyingBoat’s Hail Mary play. So I must retreat into ION (and probably give up Greece to Turkey, terrible as it sounds), because my only chance is to force England to seriously overextend enough that Germany stabs or they lose Norway.

I think it is finally time for me to test out the dynamic defense by ordering a supported attack on Galicia. I am hoping either it will succeed, and I can try for Serbia or Budapest, or Russia will destroy A Boh for me so I can build a third fleet. I am retreating from AEG into ION because I need a unit in Greece, should I wish to attack Serbia in the fall. If England doesn’t understand in the postmortem why I am doing this, it was provoked by the A Wal disband. I hope that Turkey wastes a turn moving to EAS now, as that could potentially give me the tempo I need to stabilize. Otherwise, I walk a fine line between life and death.

**Fall 09:** England (fortunately for me) did not try for an all-in on WES, instead going for the more straightforward “watch Germany make the moves they always make” and reconquer Brest. Germany just added a support to Munich to their plan, along with yet another apparent support misorder. In their defense, the support order system on WebDiplomacy is less straightforward than on backstabbr. I don’t always click ready for my moves just to make sure that the supports are correct and I’m not doing something for Venice that I want to happen to Vienna. Turkey is being predictable, moving out to EAS now. I expect a supported move to AEG next, and I need to decide whether I want to guard against treachery or not. I think I need to redevelop my units, because I cannot afford to disband F Gre. F ION, F AEG is unbreakable for Turkey until they conquer Greece and can build a third fleet. If Turkey doesn’t build a third fleet, they cannot threaten me until England gets into the Mediterranean, and even a third fleet in Ankara I can harass and stall against.

Russia now has a 100% airtight defense against me, with Ukr S Sil-Gal stopping the last gap in their armor. Redeveloping Albania to Greece might tempt Russia to do other things with Serbia such as support Bulgaria to Greece or try to encroach on me with Ser-Alb, Rum-Ser. I think if Russia goes for a supported attack on Bulgaria, I would make peace and aim for Smyrna again, but Russia can’t be thinking about that for the moment. I think what I am aiming for is tricking Turkey into letting me into AEG from Greece, thinking that they can steal Greece next spring (assuming we don’t see the ultra-conservative Con S Bul, which if Turkey makes means they don’t understand what they are doing. They should accept the draw offer if they play like that). So Tri S Alb-Ser (next spring I move to Greece) and now a new line on my northern front with Tyr S Boh-Vie, Vie-Bud.

For predictions, I think Russia repeats their defense. France supports Pic-Bre to incite conflict and to try and get the German to do something, and maybe force myself, Russia and England to do something about Germany as well. England will support IRI to MAO, possibly ordering ENG S Bre. Turkey will probably support move into AEG and move Bul-Gre, hoping for Russian support and a cut.

**Winter 09 + Spring 10:** The east didn’t move at all, but unfortunately the threat of a Turkish juke to ION or a fleet hold to steal Greece is very real, and will force some moves to change. I can’t even let Turkey into Greece in the spring because I would have to surrender AEG to reclaim it. I need to look very carefully at Russian attack plans aimed at Trieste, Vienna, Bohemia and Greece and figure out how I could attempt to counter them if Serbia is freed from the threat of a cut.

1) Ser S Bul-Gre. This is the hard counter to Alb-Gre, ION S Gre-AEG. The weakness of this line is that Trieste is now not under attack from Serbia. But there is a strong untried tactical sequence that Russia can apply (and probably is being kept in the back pocket) which counters all of my current tactics, that is to say Bud-Tri, Ser S Bul-Gre, Rum S Gal-Bud, Ukr S Sil-Gal. The weakness of this line is the counter sequence Alb S Tri-Ser, Boh-Vie, Tyr S Vie-Tri, ION S Gre H. This claims Serbia and protects it with an army in Trieste, while the Russian line did not move from Silesia. So maybe it is better to move Sil-Boh, Ukr-Gal (which is weak to a supported attack on Galicia). My Italian counter sequence is weak to an attack on Vienna, so that is next.

2) The problem for Russia with attacking Vienna right now is that they cannot simultaneously do that and support Serbia and Budapest with two units. Most of my tactical sequences have made this line very difficult, so I think we will need to wait a year or two or for other developments until Russia considers this line. This was true about the Bud-Tri order as well, but the difference is that I have usually sent Tri S Alb-Ser, which would be cut by Budapest. That is why I consider that line to be more plausible. Countering a supported attack on Vienna comes down to a guessing game as to which of Serbia and Budapest will be supported by Rumania.

3) The same weakness is present if Gal S Sil-Boh. In all honesty, probably the safest way to implement that attack would be to attack Trieste simultaneously from Budapest and order Rum-Bud. Although it must be said that I have mixed in Alb S Tri supports from time to time, so I find this also to be an unlikely sequence for the moment.

Thinking about all these lines, what I conclude is that Russia will probably stick to their safe defensive structure for now. It isn’t actually clear that Russia wants to destroy my fleet in Greece, because then Turkey is all the sudden a lot stronger. My plan is to try and trick Turkey and Russia this fall. I will begin by ordering Alb-Ser, ION S Gre-AEG. I think Turkey will try something like EAS-ION, CON-AEG, Bul S Ser (Bul-Gre makes no sense if you are trying to break into ION). I will leave Vienna unprotected this spring hoping that Russia interprets it as a sign that I will protect Vienna in the fall. My hope is that Russia anticipates my anticipation of a Greece steal by Turkey in the fall and suspects that I will order Alb-Gre, ION S Gre-AEG and responds by supporting Bulgaria into Greece, while countering my usual tactics. Then my hard counter into Serbia will work and I can finally build my third fleet.

In England news, I think they made a deliberate misorder by moving IRI-NAO while sending Bre S IRI-MAO (they don’t want Germany in Gascony). They built F Lvp, but I anticipate English fleets moving east, either to take St. Petersburg or German centers. This plan is not consistent with a quick Tunis rush, so I have a bit more time to reorganize.

**Fall 10:** Unfortunately Turkey did decide to take Greece in the spring, so my gambit failed. I think Turkey will double bounce in Smyrna and support Greece from Bul. Trying to take AEG will backfire, because I can retreat to a Turkish home center. My plan is just to be straightforward and attack Greece with three units. Turkey will build F Smy, and I will support AEG-EAS, with the plan of convoying Greece to Syria next year. I will stop attacking Russia now, so that they feel empowered to attack Bulgaria. If they do so now, we will be in great shape. I think England forces France to make a guess for Iberia. Other moves I expect will be typical. (**Postnotice: I didn’t have a lot of time to write about this turn so the analysis is short)**

**Winter 10 + Spring 11:** This year has been a turn of me making the wrong guesses when they mattered. It is looking to be a tale of the rise and fall of the Italian empire. England went to WES and Turkey played to hold onto Greece rather than fear a convoy into their home centers. I did prevent Russia from taking Vienna, but that was only because Russia cut Albania (maybe thinking I would prefer to capture with the fleet?) rather than Trieste. From my perspective, Turkey might have been aiming to sacrifice the army in Greece for a third fleet and win the naval battle that way, but that didn’t turn out to be the case. The big issue for me is that Tunis is lost to England. It could have been lost earlier but England decided to claim Brest before embarking on this journey. I disbanded the army in Bohemia because I need to threaten to convoy to Tunis. What my main goal now is to try to get both my fleets safely back to Italy. I have to hope England is worried enough about ION C Alb-Tun that they move WES-Tun themselves (instead of the stronger but riskier WES-TYS, MAO-Naf, it is riskier because I could move Tyr-Ven and outguess England in the fall). I also think Russia is going to play safety first, support Budapest and Serbia while sending a supported move to Bohemia. I will counter that by ordering Alb S Tri-Ser, Vie-Gal, Tyr-Boh. If I don’t bounce in TYS, I can support AEG-ION (I suspect Turkey thinks I kept Albania to try for Greece) in the fall. The position where I have A Ven, F Nap, F Apu is probably my best attempt to make an incomplete hold, the reason being that Turkey and Russia could start squabbling again, and perhaps I can steal Trieste at the right moment (losing all non home centers is almost certainly inevitable at this point). I can also hope that Germany doesn’t let England get away with sending two fleets on a military expedition, and at least tries to take Brest or NTH.

**Fall 11:** A small relief for me as England made a supported attack on Spain, the only outcome of which was Germany successfully capturing Marseilles. But it allowed my fleets to escape home, which is a major relief, since a bounce in TYS would have destroyed F AEG given Turkey’s orders. Russia captured and destroyed Vienna this turn, which I didn’t expect, thinking that they would play positionally in the Spring and try to secure the capture of Vienna in the fall. Germany offered a draw (maybe after the results of the season were known), which just like my offer doesn’t have to be completely sincere but may be originating from their objective assessment. **(Here I sent in my orders, which ended the season, so I will put my remaining thoughts and calculations in the winter section)**.

**Winter 11:** This was yet another example of me making a stupid move before I had analyzed all the possibilities fully. Here I think the largest mistake was readying my orders, since I had already had a morning round which had resolved before in the same manner. But let’s talk about what I saw. I had a rough sense of the Russian orders, and I had worked out that they intended to attack Trieste from Serbia. I worked out that TYS S ION, ION C Alb-Tun is the best defense of my southern front (Russia understanding that too is the reason why they can make Vie S Ser-Tri). What I didn’t respect (once again) is the inevitability of losing Trieste in the long run. France was quite aware of that, which is why they retreated to Pie and ordered Pie-Ven. The stronger move was of course Tyr S Tri-Ven, but I sent in my orders too quickly before fully fleshing out this analysis. I believe that I could have worked this out, in which case Tyr S Tri-Ven is the only logical solution, in which case I still have Tunis issues (since I need one more disband) but I can hold armies in Venice and Piedmont against Russia, and then I own Venice, instead of France. Because Venice builds a part of a stalemate line against Russia (the only solo threat anymore), if France moves Ven-Rom, they are trying to kill me, and I need to react accordingly. The same is true if Turkey tries to move Bul/sc-Gre, which is a move only made if you are trying to destroy Italy. My hope is that England realizes that it isn’t worth giving up Venice to Russia for Tunis and leaves the supply center alone for the rest of the game (England taking Tunis means I disband Pie, where Tyr is heading, I think).

I briefly considered destroying A Tun here and trying to reclaim Venice (TYS-Rom to block a hostile retreat), but Russia refutes that by cutting my support from Tyr and I gain nothing. I will also point out that Pie-Ven is a move that I think is less needed in a draw sized scoring game, unless the French player doesn’t trust Italy to defend against Russia, or they think England and Germany will collaborate to give Iberia to one or the other. Positionally, I think neither England or Germany would have wanted to do that, because the two extra units could make the difference in a stab. It should of course be stated that this is a tournament game with Tribute scoring, so from that perspective France is playing fully rationally if they don’t believe I will throw to Russia/Turkey.

England will have 6 centers if they take Tunis (and they may lose Brest soon enough). France is pretty much going to survive at this point. A 5 center England will gain 3.2 points from taking Tunis and securing my demise. They lose one point for each center Russia claims from me, and all of their points if Russia solos. So as long as they think Russia cannot take Naples, then it is a good move. Therefore, I cannot count on English support to hold Tunis against Turkey. In fact, I may have to destroy A Pie once I lose Trieste for this reason. I have to hope Russia stabs Turkey soon, or Turkey tries to defend against Russia. Incidentally, I don’t understand why England didn’t try to move to Tunis, since the supported attack on Spain was not going to be successful. I’m going to predict that Germany builds A Ber and Russia builds A Mos. Germany doesn’t seem completely interested in destroying England, just preventing English buildup, and I think Russia makes a play for Norway with Mos-Stp, Stp/nc-BAR.

**Spring 12:** My predictions were off, as Germany built F Kie and Russia built A War. I think this is the turn where Russia probably has to attack Turkey, as it is unreasonable to assume Turkey would be so trusting as to keep holding in Smyrna and leave Bulgaria vulnerable to Russia. I am going to try and force myself into the draw at the expense of Turkey. I will convoy Tunis to Greece to cut any Greek support of Bulgaria, and to prevent Turkey from rotating their army back to Bulgaria. If Russia starts munching up Turkish centers, there is less of a chance that France and England will kill me, as Russia is already close to a solo. I will then have to worry about an extreme late game attempt by France to take Rome at the last second for the chance of 1 point, but I shouldn’t be dead, like I will if Turkey gets into ION. Any plans to reclaim Tunis are vulnerable to England trying to steal Tunis off of me (which I don’t think is out of the question). Hence I am ordering a convoy which is likely to bounce. France should not take Rome now, as trading Rome for the stalemate line is poor. As long as Russia takes Bulgaria this year, France and I should be able to form an airtight stalemate line against Russia because they won’t be able to break fleets through ION. I think England will give up Brest in order to bring fleets back to protect NTH (which would be good news for my security). I suspect England won’t support into NTH until the fall, hoping that Germany and Russia bounce in Norway.

**Fall 12:** It seems there is a conspiracy in this game to throw to Russia. With some abysmal army maneuvers west which have no bearing against English fleets(!!), Germany handed Munich to Russia on a silver platter (Bur-Par gave up a critical defender of Munich), and could easily lose Berlin quickly too. Turkey continued on the crusade against my territory, which I nipped in the bud by my Greece convoy. But the worst decision came from France trying to prevent me from reclaiming Venice by means of Ven-Rom. Why would you trade Venice for Rome? Why even stab me if you are going to destroy the stalemate line anyway? If you think Russia is going to solo anyway, why make it easier? France held themselves hostage towards me by taking Venice, so I returned the favor by retreating to Piedmont. If France wants to hold a stalemate line, they should probably move to Tuscany and disband Spain, because Russia can block a supported attack into Venice, and probably will. If not, they have made me give up ION to Turkey, which hurts, especially if there is a draw with my elimination.

If France thinks Germany can hold a stalemate line, it will be put to the test. The interesting thing is that Russia might be the player who is most motivated to keep me alive (until they can solo) because of the Tribute system. So I think I probably need to prioritize Rome, let Turkey have Tunis and hope that Russia will vassalize me. So my plan is the following:

TYS C Tun-Rom, ION-Gre, Pie S Rom-Ven. There are four different outcomes, more or less:

1) I successfully support France into Venice (I don’t think Russia should allow this). Then I can either play straight up and try to hold a stalemate line (hoping France respects my play, which they might not) or go straight into treachery mode, disband Pie and hope Russia will vassalize Rome.

2) France moves to Tuscany. Then I try and hold a stalemate line by disbanding F TYS. I support France to Venice and plan the line depending on whether Turkey made it into ION or not.

3) The attack on Venice is blocked. I expect Turkey will dislodge me from ION, so I retreat to Naples, disband A Pie and A Tun and take Rome next spring.

4) France moves to Naples. I think this is unlikely, but it is still adequate for me, because Russia will have taken Venice and will now have a good shot at vassalizing me.

**Winter 12:** Option 3) happened, without me being dislodged from ION, which gives my strategy some chance of failure. But I will continue on with my plan. In fact, it is almost completely foolproof to order TYS-Rom, ION H, because if France tries to juke to Naples, I get Rome, and Turkey has to dislodge me from ION, in which case I can retreat to Naples. I think Russia will not antagonize Turkey and will build A Mos, A War, while England will get rid of F LYO. England was willing to support me to Marseilles this turn, but I have no interest in being in proximity to France. They have shown their treachery, and their payment will be Russia taking Venice, with no gain for them (assuming Russia is mathematically inclined to vassalize me). Russia took Munich but shouldn’t be able to get any further. With no way to free St. Petersburg up, this should be a stalemate. I guess what should happen is Russia takes Venice, Turkey takes Tunis, I take Rome, maybe I lose one center, and it probably ends in a draw. But we will see if England or Turkey will accept the outstanding offer.

**Spring 13:** Russia accepted the draw offer and built as I anticipated. It could obviously be a feint, but accepting it at least suggests they will let Rome live once I recapture it. France will get their just desserts for a scheme that should net them -1 points from Venice. Russia probably doesn’t even want to let Turkey take Naples in case of aggression afterwards. So it all comes down to England and Turkey. Turkey obviously won’t accept the draw until they control Tunis. We will see what England wants to do, but I doubt they have any solo hopes now that they destroyed LYO. I think their play for Spain was a mistake, and they might have been able to eliminate me had they tried for Tunis. As mentioned previously, my orders will be ION H, TYS-Rom. I don’t think there is much for me to predict elsewhere. Note that one might be tempted to mess with Turkey in case Rom-Nap happens and retreat the likely dislodged ION to Tunis. But double bouncing in TYS is not safe at all because Nap S Rom-TYS is a very cunning trick which comes close to killing me. In the best case I am brought down to one unit.

Now I see the next morning that Russia rescinded their draw offer. Were they expecting me to keep a single army in Piedmont while Turkey and France kill me? That seems like a terrible decision from my perspective. My salvation lies with Russia wanting my tribute here. If they don’t, they will tell me how I misread the math afterwards. Also, I don’t think Russia needed to rescind their offer, because there is no way that Turkey accepts the draw until they control Tunis. And with my ION hold, I am letting Turkey dislodge my fleet with only two fleets, leaving the third to maneuver back to BLA. And then Russia doesn’t have a hope of conquest, I suspect.

**Fall 13:** I got dislodged from ION, but got into Rome after France moved to Tuscany. In the meantime, they are moving to take either Marseilles or Paris back from Germany. Russia got into Venice and Piedmont, which doesn’t really matter to me. All that matters is that the Tribute scoring system should be set up so that the board topper isn’t incentivized to kill me, when there are 6 players on the board. In theory, I should therefore survive to the end, especially if Russia decides to destroy A Tus. I am basically going to send Rom S Nap, Nap S Rom until the end of the game, unless for some weird reason I can maneuver to take Venice. The rest of the world is outside of my influence at this stage, so I will just watch the chaos unfold. I will focus on observing rather than predicting from this point on. As a last note, I think Turkey should attack Russia now, as with luck they might actually become the board topper themselves.

**Spring 15:** Turkey did decide to try and eliminate me, which is not what I was hoping for, since this hands Bulgaria and Greece to Russia, and Turkey gets a minimal 0.2 points from this trade ([Rome + Naples + 2.2 points for eliminating me] - [Bulgaria + Greece + 2 points of tribute]) or even worse if those gains allow Russia to snowball even further. They should take Venice, which is free and comes from the board topper, but I am not confident in their rationality. For Russia, the calculus looks like [4-8 points of tribute + 2.2 points for my elimination + Greece + Bulgaria] - [6 points of my tribute + Venice (possibly)] which is even worse for me. In fact, consistent Turkey will probably pay off more, because they need to eliminate me in order for their strategy to become close to paying off. So that is my last blunder. Such is life, running into a situation where the “standard” incentives of Tribute happen to fail me, but I really should have checked and tried to bounce Apulia. I can go on a last “screw France” mission by supporting into TYS now, then move to WES, destroy F Rom, then move to MAO and Portugal and force the destruction of Spain and probably Portugal too when England and Germany catch on. I think France would understand.

**Fall 15:** After doublechecking the math, I am pretty much dead regardless of my choice. Turkey is happy to let Russia kill me because they still gain 1.2 points when Russia eliminates me. The benefit of Russia eliminating me is 7.2 points (4 points of tribute + 1 SC + 2.2 points for eliminating me). Therefore, Russia would need 14 centers before Rome for my tribute to overcome these gains. Without fleets, Russia will lose St. Petersburg and can conquer Bulgaria and Greece at best, and that is only 13 centers. I cannot help Russia conquer Naples. Therefore, this is truly game over, and my best shot is to make France pay for their treachery. So TYS-WES it is, and I will pray for victory over my foes. It would be awesome to end the game in Portugal, but England should not let that happen. If France doesn’t catch on, then I will attack Spain twice next year, hoping that Germany or England supports me in. Then I support England into Portugal and pray.

**Spring 16:** I ride a very thin line to survival. I need Germany to support me into Spain this year. Then I need to support England into Portugal next year, killing France and hoping that Germany keeps me alive in the fall. Finally, I have to bolt for Brest in 18 and hope England and Germany don’t see it coming. Russia made an unusually poor decision to try and keep St. Petersburg alive; they ended up both losing it due to the obvious Bal-Lvn cut and they lost Sevastopol as well to Turkey. I was thinking Turkey was quite naïve to be so trusting of Russia, but it actually paid off. I probably have to apologize for doubting their long term plans in going all-out after me rather than capture easier Russian centers. This includes the capturing of Sevastopol with a fleet, which seemed to have achieved amazing diplomatic results of Russia trusting them and putting all energy against me. I think Russia’s strategy has been subpar in this situation. They really had to attack Turkey earlier, even though the most they could hope for was possibly Greece and Bulgaria. Now they might not even board top; England and Turkey are decent candidates for doing so. They also ordered Ven-Rom which suggests they didn’t even want to try and claim Rome for themselves by something like Ven-Tus, and support Rome until you can take it yourself. I have not harmed Germany at all this game, and Germany has in general been a supportive player. I hope my plans work out, but all I can do is wait and see.

**Spring 17:** A quick recap of what went on is that I got into Spain on the second try after France misguessed against England in the fall. France destroyed F LYO and sits with an army in Portugal, while my fleet is in Spain. Germany has an army in Marseilles, and England positioned fleets in North Africa and MAO. I have to come up with the plan that maximizes my chance of survival. France or Germany will never support me in Fall 18, so I cannot expect to survive in Spain unless both France and I make it past Spring 18 alive, as England will then have to pick between which of France and I to kill. England needs to be in WES at the latest by Winter 17 in order to make sure both of us die. I also don’t think Germany wants me to die this year, because it would give England an extra build which could be applied purely offensively. But France can always support England into Spain, which negates German intervention. I think I have a decent shot of being preferred by England to France if it comes down to Fall 18. Moreover, I can see now that the Brest rush in 18 should fail to a smart England who even if they don’t build F Lon to block such a push, can simply order Por S WES-MAO in the spring while supporting into Spain in the fall. Hence, I cannot actually let England have Portugal in the fall.

My main goal right now is to work with Germany, because they don’t want England to build this year. So my spring move from that perspective should be Spa S Mar H. From France’s perspective, letting England into Spain in the fall only secures their demise, because England is more than willing to lose Spain to Germany to eliminate down to 4. Moreover, they want to get into this F 18 endgame, because Spain is a secure capture, and England might not trust me if I don’t support them into Portugal. So I think I need to build trust, and send the message now that I will kill France in the endgame, even if it comes with the risk of me dying if England captures Portugal right now.

So Spa S MAO-Por it is.

**Fall 17:** Mission accomplished! England didn’t grab Portugal and tried to juke me into WES. That wasn’t ever going to happen. Now I should be safe in Spain for another year unless Germany is ridiculous and wants to give England an extra build to harass them. Now I continue with my plan and order Spa S Mar H. The cool thing is that France should now be the player to support me in S 18. My future in this game will entirely depend on Germany being unalert and not supporting England into Spain next spring. Then England will get to be kingmaker. I think I have shown enough intent so that England can take Portugal safely in F 18, but it is up to them.

**Spring 18:** Germany managed to get fleets into position to capture NTH and threaten an English home center. England responded by offering a draw, which is unexpected. I can’t believe that they don’t realize that France and I are going to turn on each other in the fall. Did they not see my signal that I will give them Portugal? In any case, it would be an odd decision for Turkey to accept, because surely they can see that England can kill one of us. Now I am hoping that Germany is not alert and doesn’t support England into Spain. Maybe England is trying to trick France into supporting Germany into Spain this turn while they order a supported attack? It would be powerful for France to have the tempo to signal that, but I’m not sure that they will. I was about to say that France has the brilliant move Por-MAO here, which if England orders MAO-ENG, WES-MAO (which is quite logical to save both of London and Edinburgh) would leave England only in position to capture Spain in the fall, and France would survive. I was changing my order to Spa S Por-MAO before WebDip told me I couldn’t do so, and it took me a while to realize the reason was that Portugal is an army. France might actually support WES-Spa, but that doesn’t even help France because I can retreat to MAO and support England to Portugal, or move to Brest. So I don’t expect England to take Spain in the spring while vacating MAO at the same time. And if France gets England into Spain without France vacating MAO, then Portugal is dead too.

Turkey accepted the draw, so I breathe a sigh of relief. Even though I don’t get 2.2 points from France dying, who knows what England would have done?