

# The League of the Last Days

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Welcome to the first issue of *The League of the Last Days* – a free irregular zine which aims to discuss life, the universe and everything connected with the rise and fall of postal Diplomacy. This zine is available on the Internet and hardcopies are also available by post free to anyone in the UK who would like a copy – provided you write and ask to be put on the mailing list. If you are getting this it means that either you were a subscriber/trader to *Armistice Day* or you are on a list of possible attenders to MidCon who I am writing to, to pass on details of this year's con. Overseas readers must content themselves with the free version available on the Internet (sorry).

This issue is being put together from a house which is still filled with unpacked boxes, fresh from moving house. My new address is:

**Stephen Agar, 4 Cedars Gardens, BRIGHTON, BN1 6YD**

I think this house is going to be very restful and an easy house in which to bring up a family. For a start we only have one staircase now (as opposed to five) – no longer do I have to go down and up stairs just to make a coffee – and we even have the luxury of a downstairs loo. It's a very spread out house – with three reception rooms, kitchen and a conservatory on the ground floor and four bedrooms upstairs. The house was built in 1935 and has oak panelling in the hallway and dining room (which still has a bell for the maid) – which makes it feel slightly pre-war middle class, if you know what I mean. The garden is nice, if a little mature – and not having neighbours means DIY can be conducted at all sorts of unearthly hours.

The telephone number remains unchanged at 01273-562430 and any of my usual email addresses will work. The best one for personal communication is *stephen (at) stephenagar.com*. I can't put the "@" in that because it is a sad fact of life that you shouldn't type out a full email address in a document if that document is going to be put on the Internet – as the address will be harvested by spammers and then you'll end up receiving lots of emails offering "*Printer Cartridges - Save up to 90% - Ink jet & Laser Toners*", suggesting "*Boost your confidence level & self-esteem by length of your penis*" or even with the oblique and dubious subject of "*Re: My sister*". I use a small program called POPfile to filter out spam (which it is very good at doing) and calculate that 60% of all the email I receive is now spam. Much of this is due to me posting on Usenet using a real email address – and also to having had a few email addresses around on websites. Some of it is even due to other people mentioning my email address in Diplomacy zines which they then post on the Internet. At some point I am going to kill off some of the most spammed email addresses for a couple of years (my meurglys.com and armisticeday.com addresses get loads of spam – please don't use them).

Not that I am using the Internet very much at the moment – as it involves stretching a 12m length of telephone extension cord across two rooms. Having moved house I have lost my broadband connection and the room with the PC in it now doesn't have a convenient socket. Indeed, the major downside of this house move is that although this is a bigger house in terms of size, we have one room less than before – so basically Esme and I have lost our separate studies. We now have a family study – but that will have to be kept clean and tidy (as befits any room which my wife actually goes into) and Diplomacy zines and all the usual detritus of zine production and a board games obsession will have to be removed. Even the Zine Archive is in storage until we sort the house out (at which point it will end up in the garage). To make amends for all this I am going to install a

wireless LAN over the next few weeks and buy a decent laptop which can be used by Esme and I in any room of the house – some people get their kicks out of extreme sports – I get my adrenalin rush by putting together expensive high-tech projects and then worrying about why they don't work and have I wasted all my money.

Another thing I like wasting money on is CDs. I am a complete sucker for buying CD reissues – not only reissues of things I have on vinyl – but even sometimes reissues of things I have on CDs. For example – I bought the original Elvis Costello LP *Get Happy!* on vinyl in 1980; then I bought it on CD when it was re-released in 1986; then I bought it on CD again in 1994 when it was re-released with 10 extra tracks; and last week I bought it on CD again when it was re-released with a bonus CD of 30 extra tracks. That's 4 copies of the same album! The same is more or less true of all the Elvis Costello albums, as they have been re-released time and time again, each time with additional goodies for hardcore fans. It would be easy to condemn this as shameless exploitation – but hey, I wasn't forced to buy it. And *Get Happy!* remains one of the best albums of all time (in my humble opinion). So go and buy it (again).

One thing frustrating about moving house is it brings you into contacts with many different bureaucracies at the same time – the number of institutions who you have to tell you have moved – utilities, banks, insurance, local authorities etc. etc. Last time we moved I was so angered by the incompetence of Calortex in handling a simple address change that I stopped using them. This time I have encountered sublime efficiency (Nationwide Building Society); efficiency (but yet to prove themselves) – Brighton & Hove Council for a web site to change Council Tax details and Demon for appearing to process my broadband order; people who just get in the way (John Charcol mortgage brokers); people you just can't contact (27 attempts to contact Nat West card issuing Dept. – constantly engaged – finally got Nat West bank to put me through on an internal line); more people you can't contact (NTL – “please be advised you will have a wait of at least 30 mins in this queue” – I must have heard that 20 times); even more people you can't contact (gave up trying to get BT Broadband as their website kept crashing); incompetence (NTL turning up to install cable TV and they can't find their own cable in the road) and gross incompetence (Dell Computers – order a laptop and then they forgot to process the order). And I still haven't got around to the gas, electricity etc. Oh joy.

I haven't seen many zines since we moved – possibly the redirection isn't working, maybe lots of you have stopped sending them to me (with the demise of *Armistice Day*) or maybe they just aren't many zines around any more. I've already mentioned *For Whom the Die Rolls*, the ultimate amateur postal games zine from Keith Thomasson<sup>1</sup>. Up to issue 99 and still going strong – 100 pages of game reports for more or less any postal game you can think of (but mainly 18xx, RR, Bus Boss and Acquire). A similar style of zine, but more of an old-timer and now in gradual run-down mode is *Cut & Thrust* No.221 from Derek Wilson<sup>2</sup>. I must object to Derek's attempt to run a “Thinking Man's Puppet Crumpet” as (1) it excludes “Thinking Women” and (2) all the examples Derek quotes obviously assume the “thinking man” is heterosexual. If I was a woman or gay the answer would have to be Troy Tempest – as I am neither the overwhelming male bias of puppetry compels me to go for someone obvious – Madame Cholet (from the Wombles).

The main point of this issue is to persuade as many of you as possible to come to MidCon this year – we have a new committee which no longer has links with the Small Furry Creatures Press (Theo, like Elvis, has left the building) and we are trying hard to make it a success this year. The Committee Chairman is Jeremy Tullett, ably assisted by Danny Collman, David Norman, Peter

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Juniper Road, Horndean, Waterlooville, Hants, PO8 0DY

Card, Don Shailer and myself. A flyer / booking form is attached – please use it! Editors – please publicise! ☺ And note the discount for early booking – the Committee has to take on a substantial financial risk (approx. £1,000) to pay for the function rooms and if no one turns up the money is lost – so book early if you can and we will all be able to sleep easier at night. Theo does deserve recognition for the fact that SFCP stepped in to save MidCon when the old Committee (John Dodds, Chris Tringham, Brian Williams and myself) all resigned en masse – and without Theo MidCon may not have survived at all. But, the con is now in the hands of the amateurs again – so please support us. To remind you what MidCon is like – here is a review of last year’s con, kindly supplied by Mark Stretch.

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## MidCon 2002

by Mark Stretch

I first went to MidCon back in 1990. Over the years since then, some things have changed. Not least the games played, but the essence of the Con is the same. It remains a friendly place to play games with a great bunch of people, many of whom are there year after year. This makes Friday night a great chance to meet up with everyone and catch up on old times. Indeed the whole convention is always a very sociable event.

Thus with the 18xx players tucked out of the way and the Dip players at one end of the main gaming room, the rest of us played more sociable games, generally with a pint and in close proximity to the bar.



The most played game of the convention was Puerto Rico. This game was released at the start of this year and has been taking conventions by storm. It was immensely popular throughout the weekend, with numerous games in progress at most points of the Con. For those of you who haven't played it yet, the game is all about setting up a base in Puerto Rico, managing your plantations and factories to generate victory points. Like all good games it is great fun, with people enjoying it so much

they want to play it again and again. It has a bit of an Outpost flavour to it, but is a lot quicker, and with less of a random factor. I don't recall anything as popular since Settlers of Catan was first released many years ago. Puerto Rico goes down as one of those games which everyone should have.

MidCon is always the first British convention after Spiel in Essen. Thus it is generally the first chance for most British games players to try out the latest batch of German games. 2002 saw a lot of people playing Puerto Rico instead, but there were still a number of new games being tried out. Most popular amongst the new games was the new Carcassonne - Hunters & Gatherers. Also played were Trias, the bucket game & Sid Meir's Civilisation. Probably others too, which I missed.

Hunters & Gatherers follows the idea of Carcassonne and transports it back to the stone age - with a few twists. Forests and rivers replace the old cities and roads. New twists are added in the shape of

animals, fishing and special golden nuggets. In my opinion this makes it a better game than the original Carcassonne. There are more incentives to finish things off rather than stitch up others with nasty tile placement and the slightly confusing farmers rule has been removed and made simpler.

Trias is a simple little game, about the disintegrating continent of Pangea. Each player controls herds of animals which they have to use to dominate the resultant islands, as the super continent breaks up. Deceptively simple is probably the best way of describing it. The only problem is that you could do with playing it on a blank grid to help measure distance.

The bucket game is a silly little game about trying to knock down other player's towers of buckets whilst trying to keep your tower standing. Well, actually it is all about card management, only using your cards when you need to and maximizing your hand size. By contrast we have Sid Meir's Civilisation. This is a bit of an epic, based loosely around the computer game, with a similar feel. There are a number of Epochs, and the players start off with prehistoric tribes, eventually reaching the moon if they are persistent enough. Not all of the feel of the computer game is there, particularly the fact that in the board game everything is known whereas in the computer game there is the lure of the unknown. This game is an epic and will last all day, unless one player wins an early arms race.

The only problem with all these new games is not having the chance to play too many of the old classics. MidCon 2003 is confirmed for November 2003 in Birmingham and I for one will be there. Hopefully I will see many of you there again next year.

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*Tournament Director's Report*

## National Diplomacy Championship 2002

by Jeremy Tullett

In 2001 the NDC collected a total of 15 players who participated in five boards spread over the three days of the convention. This was a record low for the tournament, and it was therefore with some relief that I allocated countries to the 14 players that signed up for the Friday night round.

Ultimately, a total of 23 players participated this year, reflecting the increase in numbers registering for MidCon as a whole, and I should like to think that numbers will rise again next year. This would be most satisfying given the general decline in the postal Diplomacy hobby, and the number of players from that community who attend Diplomacy tournaments. What we must do, and what no one else has yet managed to achieve to significant degree, is to attract more interest from the email community.

The two boards on the Friday night were unexceptional, although Justin and Richard Sadler, who have not previously been to a tournament, provided a fresh mix of faces. Chetan Radia took the lead by the end of the round, but was only slightly ahead of four or five other players.

On Saturday, we welcomed Mark Fox, and Kieron Quirke who had either little or no previous tournament experience. Three boards were started, one of which was to result in some minor controversy.

One of the Tournament Director's roles is to ensure that as many players as wish to have a game may do so, within the constraint imposed by the requirement for 7 x n players. This often results in the creation of a scratch board, which may have to include the TD and/or his deputy. This board,

contrary to some views, is not necessarily at all weak, and has been known to include former champions. On this occasion, the board was won by the TD himself, and with an 18 centre finish at that.

On Sunday morning it became apparent that a view had been expressed that the TD's score should be expunged from the record, on the grounds that the TD should not be allowed to win his own tournament. A hasty meeting of some of the committee members decided that we should note this complaint, but let the result stand. There were a number of reasons for this, but one was that it was still perfectly possible for someone else to win the tournament with a score that, if difficult to achieve, was certainly not impossible.

As if to underline the point, Mark Wightman topped the one board of the day (a number of players deciding not to play because they felt that they had no chance) with a result that enabled him to capture the award for Most Successful Player of the Year. If his game had actually kept pace with the deadline schedule, he would have been only one centre short of taking the tournament title as well.

The final results were:

	Player	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Total	Best Country
1	Jeremy Tullett		173		173.00	France
2	Mark Wightman	12	90.5	57	159.50	Russia
3	Neil Kendrick	2	110		112.00	Italy
4	Ivan Woodward	36.57	60	5	101.57	Germany
5	Dave Wreathall	25.29	33	21	79.29	Turkey
6	Chetan Radia	68.5	2	7.14285714	77.64	
7	John Stratford	36.57	13.8	8.5	58.87	
8	Doug Massie	25.29	18.25	14.2	57.74	England
9	Simon Hornby	57			57.00	
10	Steve Cox	7	5	21	33.00	
11	Paul Cridland	8.5	10		18.50	
12	Paul Dowden	4	11		15.00	
13	Stephen Agar		14		14.00	
14	Dan Lester		14		14.00	
15	Justin Sadler	4	7		11.00	
16	Neil Duncan		11		11.00	Austria
17	Shaun Derrick	9.8			9.80	
18	Richard Sadler	5	3		8.00	
19	Danny Collman		7		7.00	
20	Duncan Profitt		6		6.00	
21	Kieron Quirke		4		4.00	
22	Mark Fox		4		4.00	
23	David Norman		2		2.00	

MidCon has always been to some extent about Diplomacy. It has been sad to see the number of Diplomacy games being played gradually trail off over the years – and it would be excellent if we could increase the number of boards played this year. I have always been a Diplomacy fan and have often amused myself by digging out long forgotten articles on the game and reprinting them for the sake of posterity. Back in the early 70's when *Games & Puzzles* first

started one of the earliest contributors was Don Turnbull, editor of the first ever postal Diplomacy zine in the UK (*Albion*) and one of its longest running (*Courier*) – not forgetting 169 issues of the *BDC Journal* as well. Sadly, I have just read in *For Whom the Die Rolls* that Don died on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2003. Don hasn't really been involved with the postal hobby since the late 70's – and his influence waned once *Albion* folded in 1975. For a while he was MD of TSR UK and spent some of the 80's in the USA. I corresponded with Don for a while in the early 90s – but never got around to asking him a question that has always troubled me as the self-appointed Diplomacy hobby archivist – exactly how many issues did *Courier* run for? If anyone knows, I would be grateful for a definitive answer – the last issue I know of is No. 241 – was it the last?

Anyway, in the very early days of *Games & Puzzles* Don wrote a series of short articles on Diplomacy strategy and I doubt if they have been reprinted since. These articles seem rather quaint and naive these days – Diplomacy tactics has moved on somewhat in the intervening 30 years. Anyway, here we go...

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## Austrian Strategy

by Don Turnbull

The first question a newcomer to Diplomacy is apt to ask, having surveyed the rules (you all have a new rule book, of course?) is "How do I start?" To throw some light on this question, I will deal with each country individually in the next seven articles, trying to outline the main courses of action that are available, and to give a few tips about the relevant diplomacy. Experience in play will, of course, suggest other lines of thought but if you study these articles, you will stand a better chance of avoiding leading your country to ruin in 1902.

Right? You have drawn AUSTRIA in your first game. So what?

Like Germany, Austria lies in the centre of the board, and thus provides a natural East-West corridor for marauders. Any large-scale alliance between the Eastern Powers on the one hand and the Western Powers on the other is likely to gobble up Austria on the way to fighting each other. So Austria must try to negotiate terms - perhaps Russia is the best potential ally in this respect - to prevent this from happening.

On two sides Austria has other Great Powers. Italy is close in the West (and Trieste and Venice are the only two home supply centres adjacent to each other in different countries). Germany looms ominously in the north. In the East lie the Balkans - always a source of trouble, both in the game and in history. In the south is the Mediterranean - yet sea power can rarely be boasted by Austria, which is the only country to have only one coastal supply centre.

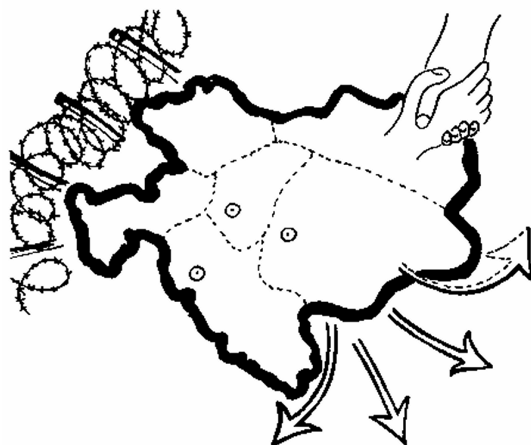
Problems, problems! But not insuperable, don't despair. Look first at the balance between land and sea power. If Austria concentrates on a land campaign (and this is tempting) then Italy and/or Turkey will have no difficulty in gaining absolute control of the Med. So a fine balance between land and sea must be struck, and unless Turkey can be persuaded to move North, and Italy cajoled into making advances towards France, it would seem important to build a fleet in Trieste in Winter 1901. Yet to leave Trieste vacant for the build is dangerous with the Italians in Venice. So come to terms with Italy, at least in the form of a non-aggression pact. The dangerous Venice/Trieste border must be kept inviolate!

That's all you can do about the sea. What about the North and the East? If Austria starts fighting Germany in 1901, no matter with whose support, defeat is inevitable. Whatever happens between these two countries (and it won't happen overnight - a German/Austrian war can be a long one) there are Great Powers hanging around on all sides waiting to take their shares of the spoils. That corridor is very useful to Great Powers at either side. So an agreement must be reached with Germany - perhaps an agreement of non-violation of the Munich border with Tyrol and Bohemia. This is mutual protection and most beneficial to both, in most circumstances.

Which leaves Turkey and Russia. And our friend the Balkans. Make no mistake about it, the way Austria, and, indeed, Turkey, plays the Balkan area is the biggest single influence on Austria's progress. There are two alternatives in the East - with Russia against Turkey, or with Turkey against Russia. If Russia and Turkey are allowed to form an anti-Austrian alliance, then pray to Italy and Germany, order the wreath, write your will and sign up for another game. You must not let these two monsters join forces against you.

Of the two alternatives, the first is more favourable, from a number of viewpoints. In the geographical sense, if Austria and Russia can eat up Turkey between them, they can both advance westwards, Russia in the north and Austria in the south, without interfering with each other's progress. (See what I mean about sea-power?) If Austria and Turkey join forces to knock out Russia, then their lines of advance later in the game are almost identical, and severe friction could result, probably with Austria being the next to succumb. Additionally, Turkey has a strong position, and cannot be allowed to survive if Austria wants to stand a chance of a win. So Russia appears to be the better ally.

Remember, too, that Russia has interests both in North and South, and would probably welcome a helping hand in the latter area, particularly early in the game when Russian strength is dispersed. Later in the game, you might take advantage of Russia's broad front to do a bit of well-timed backstabbing - but not until Turkey has been eliminated. Don't expect cakes and ale to result automatically from an alliance with Russian troops against Turkey - Turkey occupies a strong corner position and can't be easily dislodged. Also, division of the Balkans to mutual agreement isn't the easiest of matters to negotiate. The opening moves are, of course, extremely important. Austria has a total of over 200 opening moves, taking all possible combinations!



Fortunately, many of these combinations can be forgotten straight away. Anything involving the move Vie - Tri, for instance, will annoy Italy, and particularly if it is combined with the move Tri-ADS. And we don't want to antagonise Italy. Similarly, occupation of the Tyrol can't be expected to please either Italy or Germany, unless cute diplomacy has established permission.

In similar vein elsewhere, the Budapest army is best kept away from Russia, unless you want Russians stampeding into Austria in 1902. Also A(Bud)-Rum leaves Greece virtually free for the Turks. So the Budapest army must go to Serbia - this is a neutral move and one which everyone expects, so the other players aren't going to get suspicious.

So that means A(Bud)-Ser and probably F(Tri)-Alb to aim for Greece, to leave Trieste open for the Winter 1901 build, and to pacify Italy. A(Vie) is perhaps better where it is; if it moves to any northern province, Germany will be annoyed, Russia will be annoyed, and Russia might be suspicious of A(Vie)-Bud which seeks to occupy Rumania in Autumn 1901. In addition, the possibility of an Italian attack on Trieste in Autumn 1901 has to be considered, and to allow the Vienna army to stand is a good way of defending against this. So, perform your negotiations, order A(Vie) stands; A(Bud)-Ser; F(Tri)-ADS and sit back to await the next stage.

By the way, did I mention the most important rule for every country? No? Of course, the name of the game gives it away, but it's surprising to find many new players who think there is no need to communicate with other players, only to find themselves knocked out early. The most important rule is COMMUNICATE and NEGOTIATE!

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## Keith Loveys

Finally, I can't close this issue without mentioning Keith Loveys who died suddenly on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2003. Keith was a constant feature at all major cons and I have played many different games with him over the years, although his taciturn nature meant that casual acquaintances like me didn't really get to know him. Here are Chris Tringham's recollections of Keith:

*"I think I first met Keith 25 years ago when we were both living in Norwood (South London). If I remember rightly he was sharing a flat (25b South Norwood Hill) with Paul Willis, brother of Eric (of Leviathan fame). This was the venue for a housecon in the late 70's, where I probably played poker for money for the first time, and predictably lost quite heavily. I am fairly sure it was Keith to whom I owed the money, and he was very patient and didn't press me for payment! I think I paid him back several months later."*

*"Over the years I played both bridge and poker with Keith many times, and unquestionably he was much better than me at both (at one time he was one of the top bridge players in the UK), but it was always enjoyable to play with/against him. He was one of the regulars at Richard Sharp's Easter and October events in Amersham, where bridge featured strongly, and it's very sad to lose Keith just a few months after Richard."*

*"Keith was a man of simple pleasures (beer, cigarettes and games, as far as I am aware) and he worked (in IT) only enough to pay for that and no more. At a con he would be playing games rather than sitting at the bar, and his zine **Snorwood Gazette** was also straightforward and unpretentious."*

*"I can't claim to have got to know Keith very well, but he was clearly a nice guy and an excellent games player."*