The DowntownVASSAL Interface.
By Antonio Pinar.

Introduction.

The Main Interface is the core of the VASSAL engine; from here you can perform lots of actions like loading an online game, starting a new online game, or launch the PBeM.

But as a first step let's see what is and how is designed the Downtown Main Interface.

This is the Downtown Main Interface, It is divided in several windows and switches. The biggest window is the Chat window. The chat window is divided in two blocks; one of them shows the traffic sent to the server by the players, the other is where the player write the words to form a message to be uploaded to the server.

The great white space in the middle of the interface is the **Chat Window** where the player can read the messages sent by the system and players linked with the server. In the image above the message shown is – Downtown version 01. Under the main chat window is located a thin window, this is the **Chat Line Window** where the player can write his messages to upload to the chat server.

Above the main chat window there is a stripe with several switches, this is the **Control Panel**. The player can perform several actions switching on/off these switches. This panel will be explained later in this write.

Above the Control Panel is located the **Game Panel**. This panel ise common to all the VASSAL modules and contains only two keys; File and Help. Clicking on either key a specific menu will be launched; the File Menu clicking File, and the Help Menu clicking Help.

Many switches are not available to the player at a specific time, you can reckon this switches (or options) easily, the one not highlighted is not available to the player at this

time. In our example interface window above the *US Force Pool* for example is not available to the player at this time.

The Game Panel.
As mentioned two Keys are available; the File and the Help key. Each key has their own menu associated to it, in such a way that clicking either key will launch their distinctive menu.

The File Menu:

This is the File Menu; from this menu you can launch a new game, load a previously saved game, edit your own preferences… etc. Note there are some options not available to the player at this time, loading a game or launching a new game will change their availability status.

The Help Menu:

This is the Help Menu, this menu provides instant help to the player. As can be seen, there are three options and all of them available to the player, depending the help the player is looking, one or another may be launched.

Control Panel.
Under the Game Panel is the Control Panel, this window provides full control over all game features. Each switch performs a different action necessary to play Downtown, and as you can imagine, this window is specific for Downtown.

The PBeM navigation Switches.

When you are playing a PBeM game, selecting this switch, you can undo the last move loaded. As you can see, all switches have an explanatory pop up text associated to it.

This switch will perform a step forward in the loaded logfile. This switch is only for PBeM games, and clicking on it will execute the next step (or move) contained into the loaded logfile.

Both switches can be used as a whole, performing steps forward and steps backward as player desire. They are used with PBeM games, however the Undo switch can be used with any game loaded.

Going Online Switch.

This switch will launch a new window to connect to the internet allowing players to play online. Clicking this switch, the system will launch the Server Control window, this window has its own switches and windows, this window will be treated later.

Board Switches.
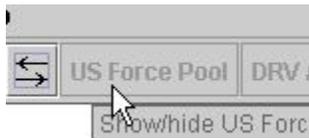
This switch will launch a new window, the US Force Pool board. This switch is available only to the US Player, and only when a game is loaded. The DRV Player will not be able to open this window, keeping the US Plans secured.

This switch will launch the DRV AF Pool board. This switch is available only to the DRV Player, and only when a game is loaded. The US Player will not be able to open this window keeping the DRV plans secured.
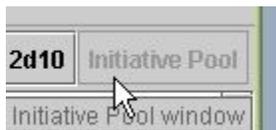
This switch will launch the Initiative Pool board. This switch is available to both players, but each player is able to handle his own deck.

Pieces Switch.

This switch will open a new window in witch the player has available counters and markers. Take note some counters and markers are available only to the owner player.

Dice Switches.

Clicking this switch the system will simulate the launch of a ten sided die. This die roll is also launched pushing the key <F1> on the keyboard such as indicated in the pop up text. The resulted die roll will be shown in the Chat window.

Clicking this switch the system will simulate the launch of a set of two ten sided die. This die roll can be read as either, the sum of both dice or as a percentile die roll. This die roll is also launched pushing the key <F2> on the keyboard. The value rolled will be shown in the chat window as two numeric values, one for each die.

Chat Interface.
As mentioned before, the chat interface is subdivided in two independent windows, the Main Chat window and the Chat line window. The chat interface is designed to allow players communications between them, also shows system notifications.

Main Chat Window.
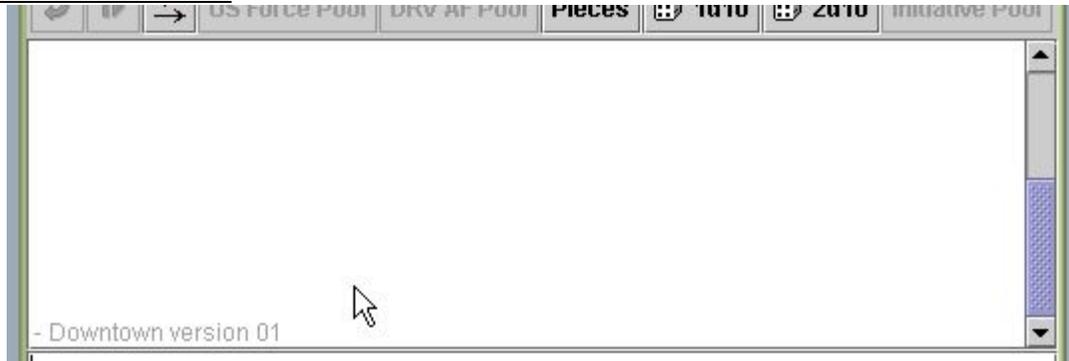
This is the Main Chat window, this interface allows players to communicate between them. This window will show all messages sent over the server by the own player or by other players. Also, this window is used by the system to communicate with the players, reporting game issues like counter and marker movements, new counters and markers created by players, die rolls, initiative chits draw… etc. This window will notify players when the system is connected to a server, reporting also the version of the game being used.

Chat Line Window.

This is the Chat Line window, this interface allows the player to send messages to other Players connected to the server. To send a message to the server, the player will write the desired phrase pushing the key <ENTER> to validate the message, after a few seconds the message will be displayed in the Main Chat window along with the nickname adopted by the player.

Creating a new Game.

Now you will be instructed in how to create a new game. It is assumed you are familiar with the Main Interface. It is supposed the Main Interface is displayed in your desktop.

1. Click the File key to launch the File Menu.
2. In the File Menu select the option New Game. A new window will appear at this time, asking you about what side you want to play with, select the desired side and press the key <OK>. The Map board will be loaded at this time, and all switches become available.
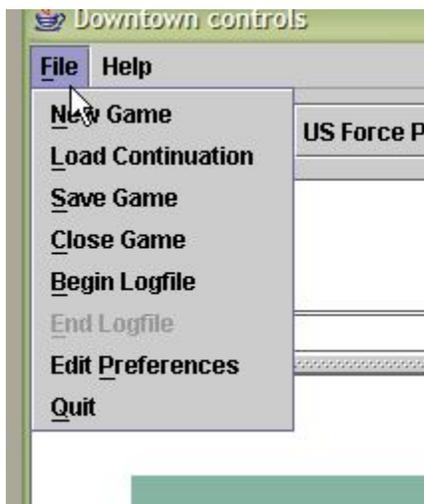
Now you are ready to play… vs. yourself!
If you want to play vs. an opponent, there are two ways to go from here; Face to Face via online, or PBeM.

Going PBeM:
Let's simulate we are creating a PBeM game, because the online connection is better with no game loaded in the interface.

To go PBeM launch the File Menu again, with a game loaded you have to see a File Menu like this:

Now select the option **Begin Logfile** from the File Menu. From this time all your actions will be recorded by the system. Note however, you have all the options available except the one called *End Logfile*. The option **End Logfile** will become available once you have selected the option *Begin Logfile*. As you are a smart guy, at this time you have extracted that this *End Logfile* option is used to finish your Player turn (or whatever you are doing!), saving all these recorded moves and messages posted.

Once pushed the **End Logfile** option a new window will appear asking you about the location and the name where to grab the new Logfile.

At this time, you can write a fine warning message to your opponent and emailing the message and the logfile to your opponent.

There is another unknown option available, **Load Continuation**. This option is used when you are playing a PBeM game to upload the logfiles your opponent is sending you in response yours.

Going Online.
The more challenger way to play Downtown (aside the real one face to face) is going online: the virtual face to face. Now you will be instructed in how to go online, and play games online. It is supposed you have not game loaded and the main interface is displayed in your desktop. Also it is supposed you are familiar with the Main Interface.

1. Click the Going Online switch to launch the Server Control window.
2. Once the Server Control window is launched, press the key to connect to the server.
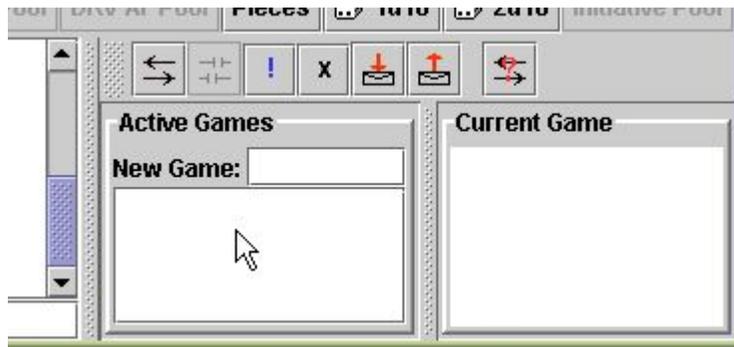

This is the Server Control window, here you can see some new switches and two new windows called *Active Games* and *Current Game*, and also there is a little window into the Active Games window called *New Game*.

The switch to connect to the server is the first key on the left hand, next (not available yet) is the key to exit from the server. Remainder keys are used to show the player status to the rest of the room, and finally the keys to upload and read mails hanged on the server. Still there are a last key, the one with an interrogation sign, it is used to explore who are playing modules using VASSAL.

The two windows are used to show who are connected to the server and using the Downtown Module. The window **Active Games** will show all *rooms* created where players are running games. The window **Current Game** will show who is connected to the room highlighted in the *Active Games* window. The little window into the *Active Games* window and called **New Game**, it is used to create a new room where to run a new game.

The Game Interface.
Once a game is loaded, new windows and switches will be added to the Main Interface. This is the display that appears once a game is loaded:
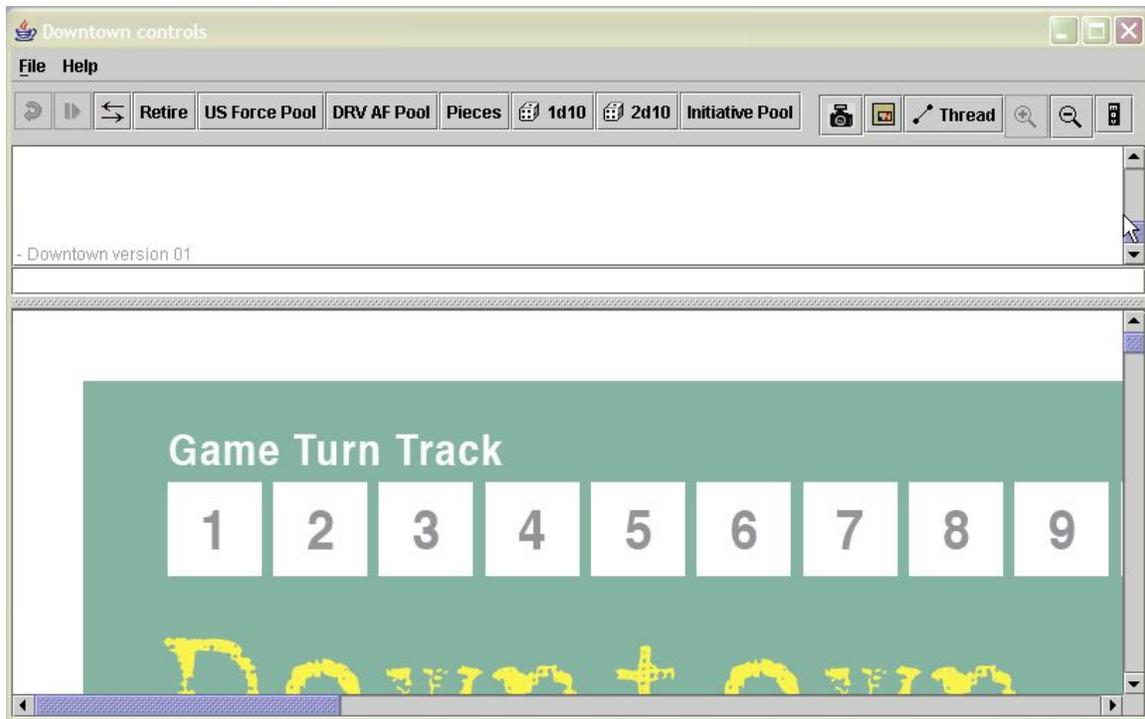
As can be seen, a whole new window will appears under the Chat Line Window; the Map Board window. Also new switches will be added to the ones already existing.

The new switches are used to handle the map board window and to provide new features to the player status. The *Retire* switch is used to allow the player to leave their sit, allowing new players to take the just vacated sit.

The Map Board Switches.

These are the Map Board Switches. The first switch with a camera image is used to take an instant image of the map. The next switch is used to hide or show the map board window. The *Thread* switch is used to take a line between two given points over the map, providing the distance in hexes between both points. Next are two switches to provide Zoom capabilities to the map. Finally the last switch is used to delete the "*moved*" labels that receive the moved flights.

The VASSAL Server.
The VASSAL engine uses a private server maintained and supported by Rodney Kinney with the only purpose to support the gamer's community. This server is used every time a player connects to the internet using the VASSAL engine. Players using the same

VASSAL Module will be able to see each others, but those using a different VASSAL Module will not be seen. In other words, players have to be using the same Module to play between them, or observe other games. The server can be busied with lots of games from a wide variety of Modules in play, but players are aware of them using the same Module.

This server is supported by a machine acting as a host, and as always, machines are affected by several problems that can put them out of order. When this problem happens, the server simply hangs out and become out of order. In support to this problem, there is a backup server that assumes responsibility and if things go worsen, still a final step; the application then launch an interface allowing connections between own players using the machine of either player as the new host.

Game Pieces.

Counters and Markers are termed as Game Pieces, and so available into the counter tray window. To launch this window, the player has to click on the *Pieces* switch. The counters and markers contained into this Counter Tray Window are the ones used to move and place over the Map Board Window. The DRV and the US force Pool contains their own set of pieces, but this pieces can be used ONLY into the own Pool. There is another Pool available, the Initiative Pool, pieces belonging to this last Pool must to be placed over the Map Board in order to work properly, this is the ONLY exception that allows pieces belonging to a Pool Board to be set up over the Map Board Window.

This is the Counter Tray Window; here the player has all the counters and markers necessary to play Downtown available. This window uses the principle "click and drag" to CREATE playing pieces over the Map Board Window.


The Counter Tray Window is designed in that a way that players always know where to find a given counter or marker.

All US Units are contained into the *US Forces* folder, so all US flights are available into this folder. The same can be said for the *DRV Forces* folder. The DRV Player has to go to the *DRV Forces* folder to find all his flights and ground counters. Markers can be found in the *Markers* folder.
Every folder is organized in that a way that a given player can find the desired specific counter (or Marker) easily.

The image above shows the Marker folder with the *Basic* Markers subfolder shown on the tray window. To draw a marker from the tray window, the player has to click and drag the desired counter to its destination hex or new location. The Marker folder is subdivided in several subfolders, the one shown is the *Basic* Subfolder.
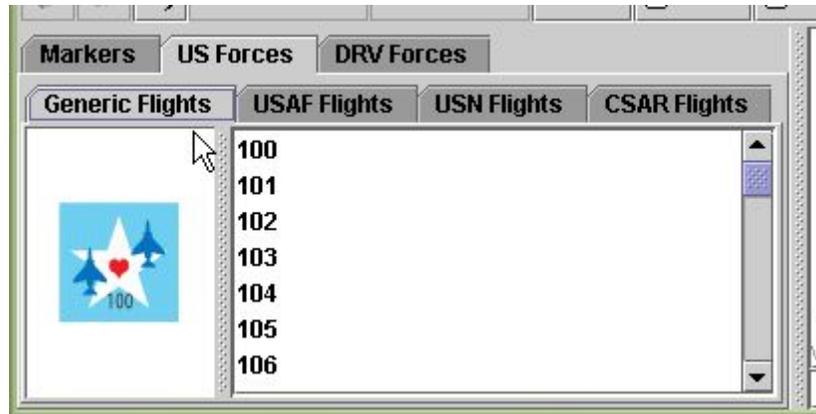
This is the *US Forces* folder, as can be seen it is subdivided in three more subfolders, and them subdivided again in several subfolders more. This design is useful to easy find where is located a specific counter. Again, to draw an US Flight from the tray window, the player has to click and drag the desired flight to its destination hex or new location.

This is the *DRV Forces* folder, as occurred with the US Forces folder; it is subdivided in several subfolders.

Characteristics.

Counters and Markers are doted with specific characteristics depending the type of unit it is representing. As a common rule, right clicking over the counter or marker, a menu window will be displayed from the counter (marker) with all the options applicable to that counter listed on it.

The image shows the option menu specific for this counter, a US Generic Flight. Selecting an option with the mouse pointer will perform the selected action for immediate.

Note there is a shortcut key listed along the specific action available for that key. For example, the listed Option **Flightlog** can be launch in both ways,

selecting it with the mouse pointer or simply typing the combined key <CTR + I>.

The menu displayed in our example is common to all the Flight counters; other counter types use different menus.

The more distinctive menu entries will be explained here below to help understanding.

Flightlog (SAMlog).
This is an optional feature. This feature simulates the Flightlog (SAMlog) for the selected Flight (SAM) Counter. All fields contained in the paper version sheet are implemented here, so if a player wants to play avoiding using the paper sheet has to use this feature instead.

Text.
This is another optional feature, here the system puts a text field in the players hands where to point comments that are visible to all players. This field can be useful to take note about issues like throttle settings, selected speed, aborting flights… etc.

Rotate.
Flights must rotate in order to change heading, here the system allows the player to change course with a mouse click or simply by typing the shortcut key.

Mark Moved.
The system take account of flights moved (flights are considered moved when they change their map location, not their facing). Using this option, the player can voluntarily change this status.

Flip.
Many counters and markers are double sided pieces; the player can voluntarily change the side representing the game piece.

Clone and Delete.
The gaming pieces can be freely deleted once their use is not longer necessary, the fact to clone a game piece is not recommended, players should avoid cloning game pieces.

Property Setting.
In order to preserve some counter's features secured from the "indiscrete" opponent's eyes, some game pieces were provided with an ownership pattern. This last feature provides the necessary "fog of war" with the which the game was designed. There are some game pieces (and boards) which have given a specific owner player, only the owner player has free access to those game pieces (and boards).

This property setting cannot be changed during a game, nor even at start of the game; the module has been built based on property setting patterns.

Still there is a last issue here. The game was designed allowing a Player playing solo, in that a way that when a game is launched as a solo game, the solitaire Player has free access to all counters, markers and boards.

Pools and Boards.
The module has been designed based in three Pools and one Board, the Map Board.
The Map Board is where the game takes action. All game pieces placed on the map comes from the Counter Tray Window and so fully visible for both players; the DRV and USA (also for observers, if any), the only exception to this rule, as explained before, is for the pieces coming from the Initiative Pool.

As mentioned before, Pools are owned by specific players. The DRV AF Pool is owned by the DRV Player and only the DRV Player has fully access to this board, the same is said for the USA Player and the US Force Pool. In fact, players without ownership cannot even launch the Pool not under his hands. Finally as occurred with counters and markers, Pools can be freely accessed by a solitaire Player.
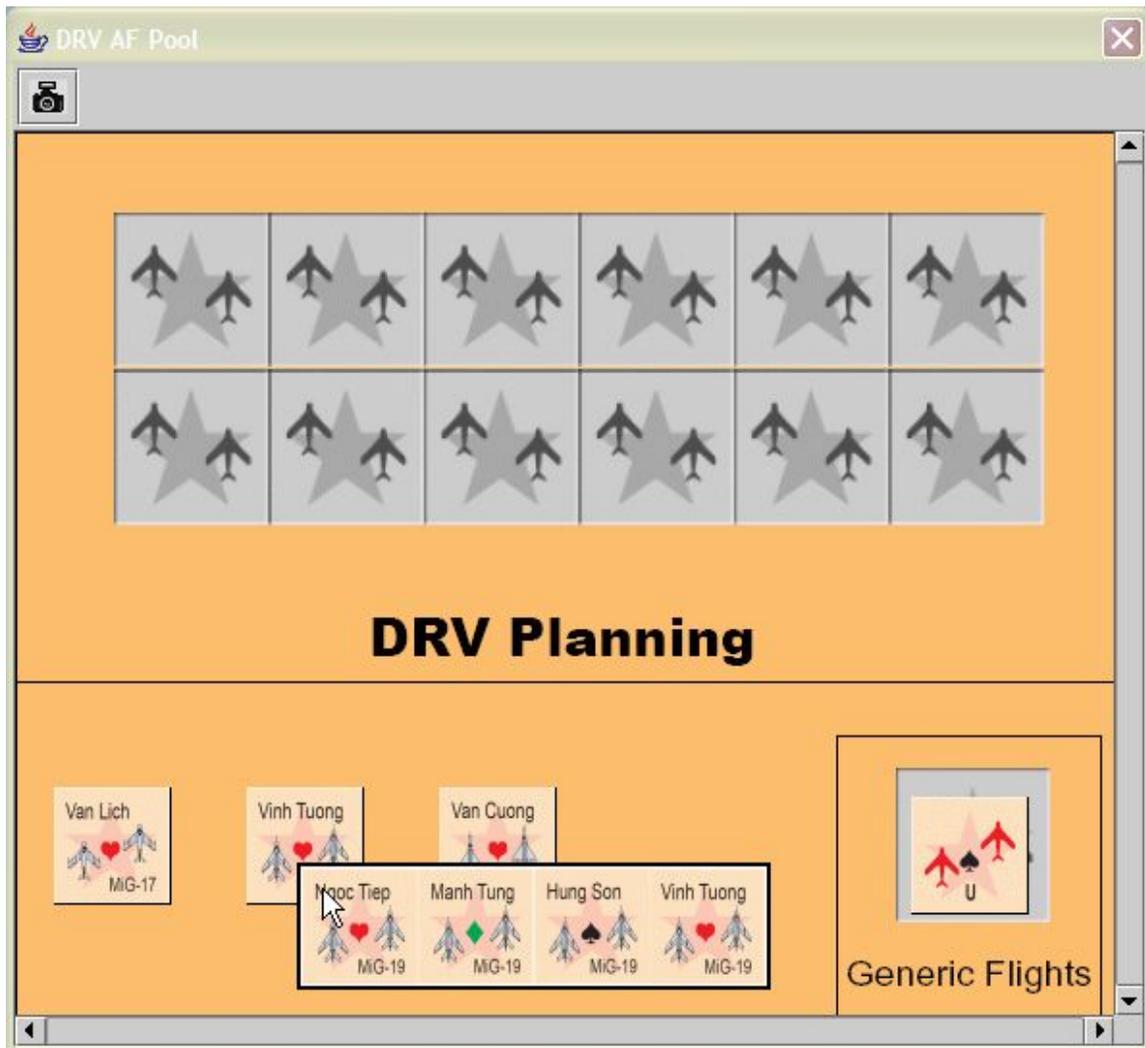
This is the DRV AF Pool, here the DRV Player can plan his air game aside the opponent's eyes. In this board, the DRV Player has available all his flight counters, Generic and Visually Sighted. Unlike the Counter Tray Window, the counters provided within the Pools are available in a limited account, within the limits given in the original counter mix provided with the Gamebox.

Ending.
Well folks, till here was given the necessary instruction to start playing Downtown using the VASSAL engine. Still there is pending some more features and tips, but this work is left to your own experimentation impulse.

Also I expect all you that are reading this posting will be able to understanding me well, at least that was my first intention here.

Yours,
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Madrid.
Spain.