Alert Helper - Usage and Install Guide

compiled by Roger Pfister

Usage   For the **Install Section**   see later in this document.

When running, **Alert Helper** looks as shown below. As you move your mouse over the text, each 'Alert Name' becomes highlighted. For example can see the 'Alert Name' **Captaincy** showing in this way.

When you click on a 'Alert Name' the alert text for that name will be put into the **Clipboard** so you can **Paste** it in to your Bridge application in the normal way, for example by mouse menu or using Cmd / Ctrl - V key strokes.

If you have the **Auto Paste** option selected then the alert text will ALSO be pasted directly into the previously selected window. So you need to remember to select the **Alert Box** on your Bridge Playing app **before** you click the 'Alert Name'.
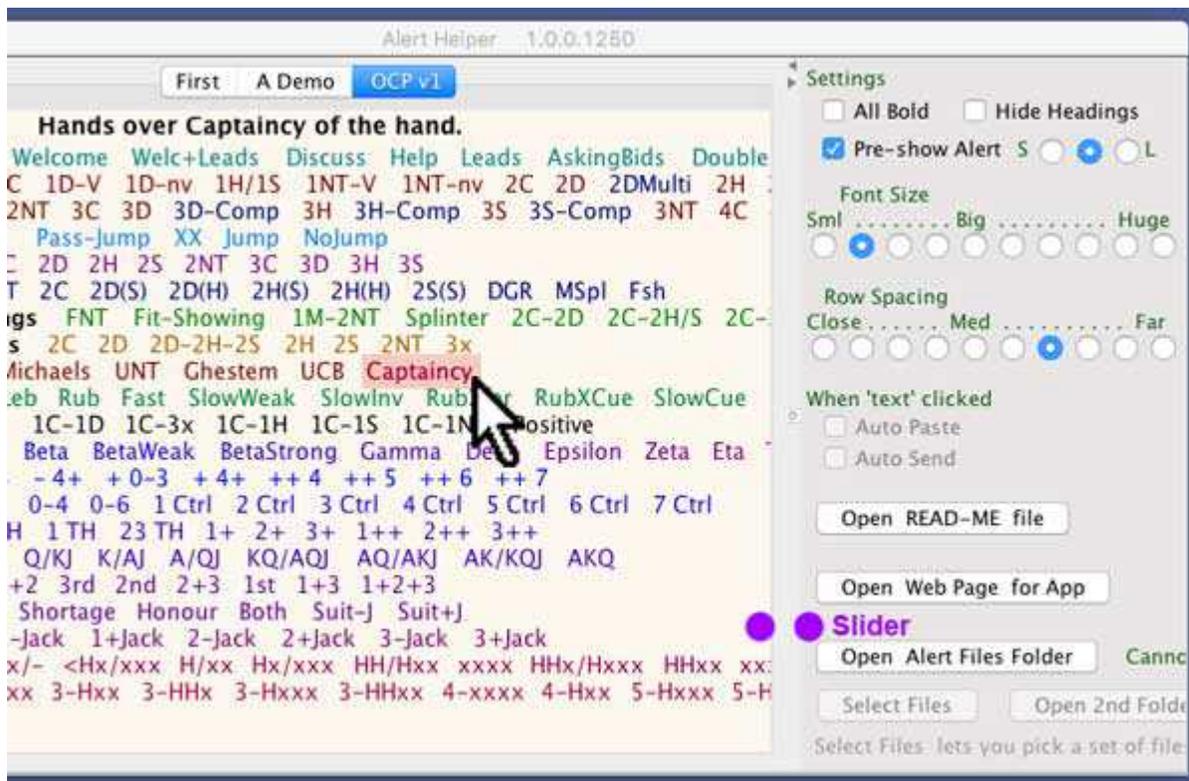
Auto Paste and **Auto Send** (described later) are not available on the MAC (due to restrictions by Apple) and are shown faded.

You can optionaly display the Alert text using **Pre-show Alert**, as above.

Sending an Alert   –   Best Practice

This is my recommendation for how to best use **AlertHelper**.

1. Click the   **first bid part**

2. Click the   **Alert** button
   (this will select the alert box)

3. Click   alert text   in   **AlertHelper**

4. Click   **Cmd / Ctrl-V**
   or do a   **Paste** by another method
   (**not needed** if using Auto Paste)

5. Click the   **final bid part**

If you develop a single standard click order (for bids that need alert text), then the process can become very fast. It does not have to be the order I suggested above.

I do recommend that you **ALWAYS** click the Alert button. If a bid needs alert text then it should have always have an Alert.

FYI - Some bridge playing clients are known to   NOT   tell the opps that there is any alert text UNLESS the bidder has ALSO clicked the Alert button !

There is web client limit for Alerts is 39 characters. This limit is of more importance when it comes to creating or amending existing Alert files.

For **Auto Send** see the later sections,   **Auto Send** and **Multi-line support**

2nd Folder - What is that ?

Later sections cover HOW to modify Alert Files. A key reason for modifying, and making your own, Alert Files is that you want to add to modify or create an alert file to provide a set of alerts form systems not yet covered.

The easy way to create the alert files is to use the **Open Alert Files Folder** button to open the folder and there duplicate an existing alert file or just use your operating system commands to make a new empty.txt file and edit that is required. (See later section on formatting).

One problem occurs if you make a significant number of Alert Files perhaps in some of them are later versions. You will probably find that you do not want 10 or 20 alert file tabs available at one time.

Also a number of teachers have previously created **alert files** for the earlier Windows only **ChatAssistant** application. These do not so much, send alerts, as send chat lines, to the chat box, so the teacher can display a lot of preset text during their lesson.

The solution to this problem is to divide your Alert Files into two categories, those you want to see every time you start **AlertHelper** and those you only want to have visible if you choose to select them for that session.

Drag the, right hand slider, far to the left and you will see a **Choose 2nd Folder** button (purple dots).   This will open a "folder chooser" dialog from which you can choose a folder. **MAC users** have complications using the "folder chooser" so a special folder is pre-created for them called **AlertHelper_2nd_folder** (it is recommend they choose it, as shown above).

The alert files you want to see every time you start **AlertHelper** should be left in the alert_files folder. The alert files you want to see only when you choose to see them should go in the **2nd Folder.**

Now any time **AlertHelper** is running you can click on the **Select Files** button and a "file chooser" dialog will open and show you all the Alert Files (.txt) in your chosen the second folder. You will can now select one or more of these files.

The files you do select will be added to the display tab list. But only for this session. So when you close **AlertHelper** and reopen it they will not be displayed.

TIP – You can use the   **Open Alert Files Folder** and the **Open 2nd Folder** button to quickly display both folders and easily drag files from one to the other.

Viewing the Alert Files

The alert files that match the 'Tabs' shown at the top of the App's window are read from the **alert_files** folder.

You can view this folder by clicking on the   **Open Alert Files folder** button.

It is easy to change the contents of the Alert files and add new ones but DO REMEMBER that whenever you update the **AlertHelper** app the 'standard' files will be replaced. So best to copy any alert file to a new name before changing it.

The Demo.txt file - Open a Teaching Table - TRY IT OUT

Sit in all four seats of a Teaching table. Use the **Open Alert Files folder** button to view the **Demo.txt** file contents.

Make some alerted bids and send some long message to the Chat box. All will become clear very quickly.

Modifying the Alert Files

Get a Good Text Editor

The alert files are just simple text files. So best you use a good text editor to change them. Your favorite Word Processor is NOT a good option. Two good free text editors are

TextWrangler is recommended for **MAC's**
     http://www.barebones.com/products/textwrangler/download.html

NotePad++ is recommended for **Windows**
     https://notepad-plus-plus.org/

Show the file extensions

You MAY find it easier to see what you are doing to files if you can see the hidden 'extensions' at the end of filenames.
For **MAC's** see
     https://support.apple.com/kb/PH19072?locale=en_US

and for **Windows** see
     http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/show-hide-file-name-extensions

Linux users are expected to already know all this stuff. :)

TIP – When you have saved your changes to your alert file, click on one of the **un-selected** Font Size buttons. As a side effect This will re-load all the alert files.

Alert File Format

The some what quirky format of these files is because they need to match an earlier format used in the **ChatAssistant** windows program. This allows ChatAssistant Alert files to work in **AlertHelper**.
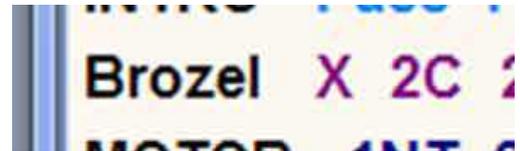
The **ChatAssistant** logo has been re-used for **AlertHelper**.

```
`       keep
`       keep    000000    `Brozel          `-
`       keep    800080    `X               `Single-suiter. N
`       keep    800080    `2C              `!C + !H, at leas
```

The above example lines come from the alert file **OCP.txt** On the right is their output.

Brozel X 2C 2

The first line causes a "Start at new line" the second 'Brozel' is inactive text and the 3rd and 4th are active clickable alerts.

Each line MUST have exactly 3 separators these are all ` the grave character. The first grave MUST be in the first column.   The final ' must be followed by text, (a single hyphen is treaded as empty text. If any of these conditions are not met then the line is ignored.   So you can add comments to the file anywhere just by, not starting a line with a ` character.

A line must have spaces after the first grave ` then mandatory, but arbitrary, solid text (red bar). Next is an optional color definition (green bar). This is formed of three pairs of hex digits in RGB (Red Green Blue) order. Each pair can be 00-ff (0-255 decimal).   If the color def is omitted it defaults to 000000 (black).

After the second grave ` comes the Alert Name e.g. "2C" then spaces then the third grave, after which is the actual alert text that will eventually be seen by the opps. A empty Alert Name causes the start of a new row. If there is just a single hyphen '-' after the third grave then the item is an inert label and always show as bold. Such labels are conventionally set to back but do not have to be.

Extra space between Alerts   A line with a single '.' as the name of the Alert and a hyphen '-' as the Alert text will create a double sized gap between Alerts.

Auto Send

Up to now this text has made some key assumptions, principally that the alert text is always intended to go in the alert box on your Bridge playing client and so will always be sort, 39 characters or fewer.

But sometimes you want to send larger amounts of text to the chat box. For example to welcome your Opp's and give a brief description of your system. (The Chat Box on the web client currently has a limit of 246 characters in a single send).
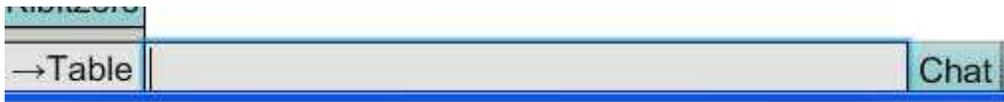
It is simple to use longer than 39 character messages in **AlertHelper**, just to do it. But of course you must remember to click in the chat input window **before** you do the **Paste**.

If you are using a system that supports **Auto Paste** (Windows or Linux) then you have an extra option **- Auto Send**.

When **Auto Send** is checked and you click on an 'Alert Name' in **AlertHelper** the following happens:

Firstly (as with Auto Paste) the text will be pasted into the last selected window.

Secondly the ENTER key will be invisibly clicked. On most Bridge playing clients this will send the pasted text up to the Bridge playing server.

Take care when using **Auto Paste** and **Auto Send**. The text will be pasted into the last application window that you have open. It can be annoying to have bid alerts appear in the middle of an email you are trying to write while playing bridge.

Multi-line Support

If you are using a system that supports **Auto Send** (Windows or Linux) then **AlertHelper** can send multi-line messages. The text of a multi-line message will be split into multiple lines whenever it finds a circumflex ^ character.

The choice of circumflex dates back to the older Chat Assistant windows only application.   A circumflex ^ signals that you want the earlier text to be sent followed by an ENTER followed by the next section of text again stopping at the next circumflex.

A circumflex at the beginning or the end will not generate an extra blank line.

Q. What happens to multi-line messages if **Auto Send** is NOT enabled ?

A. The ^ circumflex and any spaces either side of it are removed and replaced by a a comma and spaces. This text can then be pasted in the normal way.

Line Continuation Character - Backslash

When writing your own long text messages, you may find it clearer if text is broken across multiple lines of the text file.   To do this use the backslash '\' character. It must be the first character on a line.

A backslash causes that line to be merged onto the end of the previous line. All spaces between the two parts are reduced to a single space. You can have successive continuation characters line after line.

The A_Demo.txt file - Open a Teaching Table - TRY IT OUT

Sit in all four seats of a Teaching table. Use the **Open Alert Files folder** button to view the **A_Demo.txt** file contents.

Make some alerted bids and send some long message to the Chat box.   All will become clear very quickly.

<end of page>

Installing on Windows

Go to the **AlertHelper** Website

http://rogerpf.com/AlertHelper
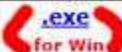
Click on the **.exe** link to download the **AlertHelper_...._setup.exe** file. You can choose to run it at once OR after it has downloaded you can run it in the normal way.

If you do not have Java installed you will be taken through the steps by that will download and install Java from Oracle.

If you want to see images of this process you can follow by looking at the steps (shown later) of Installing Java for the MAC.

NOTE - The windows setup installs the **same .jar file** as is in the MAC package but the windows installed is much easier to use and so strongly recommended.

Why all These Warnings   (and OTHERS) !

The real point of all these warnings is asking you.

Can you **TRUST** **this software provider (me) ?**

Warnings or no warnings if, you don't trust it then DON'T install the software.

Do you know anyone who is already running it ?
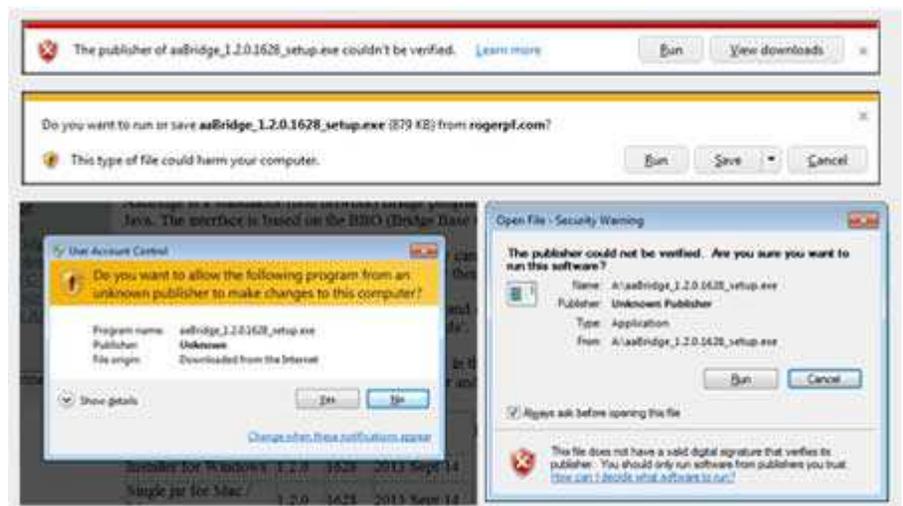
Installing on MAC and Linux

Go to the **AlertHelper** Website

http://rogerpf.com/AlertHelper

The page should look something like the image above.

Click the **pk.zip** link shown ringed in **purple.**

The **AlertHelper_1.0.0.nnnn_pk.zip**
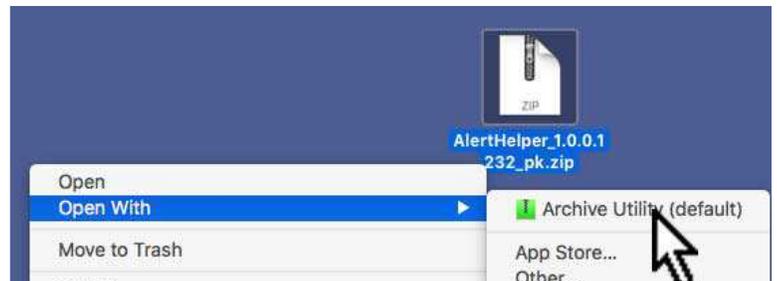file will download in the normal MAC way.

Click on the downloads area to see it

Drag the file from downloads and drop it on to your
desktop.

Double click the file to have it
automatically expand.

Or use the mouse menu as shown.

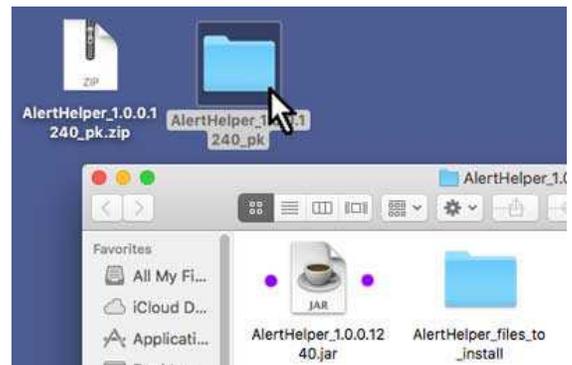This will create a folder called **AlertHelper_1.0.0.nnnn_pk**

It may be created almost on top of the file. So
drag it to one side.

Double click that new folder to enter it using
Finder   (as shown).

You should now see the **AlertHelper** java file.
Marked in the image, with **purple** dots.

You are now ready to run this jar file **AlertHelper_1.0.0.nnnn.jar** for
the first time. This will complete the install.

Running the .jar for the First time (on a Mac)

If you have Java installed and you have run other Java .jar's then this will be straight forward.

A normal method (shown in the diagram) is to use the mouse menu.

Double clicking on the .jar file may also work on your system. MAC's vary from OSX version to version.

If you don't have Java installed SEE the NEXT SECTION.

When you run a new **AlertHelper...jar** for the first time the following happens.

The **.txt** files in the adjacent folder **AlertHelper_files_to_install** are moved to

      <your user home>/**AlertHelper/alert_files/** these are the alert files.

      Older alert files with the same name are overwritten.

The READ-ME.pdf in that folder is moved to
      <your user home>/**AlertHelper/**

A copy of the jar is <your user home>/**AlertHelper/** and on the Desktop.

the **AlertHelper_files_to_install** folder is then deleted.

You are now free to tidy up and drag the **_pk.zip** file and the created **_pk** folder to the trash.

A copy of the **AlertHelper_1.0.0.nnnn.jar** will have been put on your desktop so you can easily start **AlertHelper** in future. You are, of course, free to delete it and instead use the copy in <your user home>/**AlertHelper/** .

<end of page>

How Java Installs on a Mac

So you have clicked on a .jar and tried to get your Mac to run it.

(Yes, I know some of the filenames shown in the images are for a different jar).

Your Mac has popped up with message like that shown here on the right.

If you do have JAVA installed and instead get **messages** tell you that you do **not have permission** to run the .jar then please see later.

If you don't see this message with its button then you can use the link below.

http://www.oracle.com/technetwork/java/javase/downloads/index.html
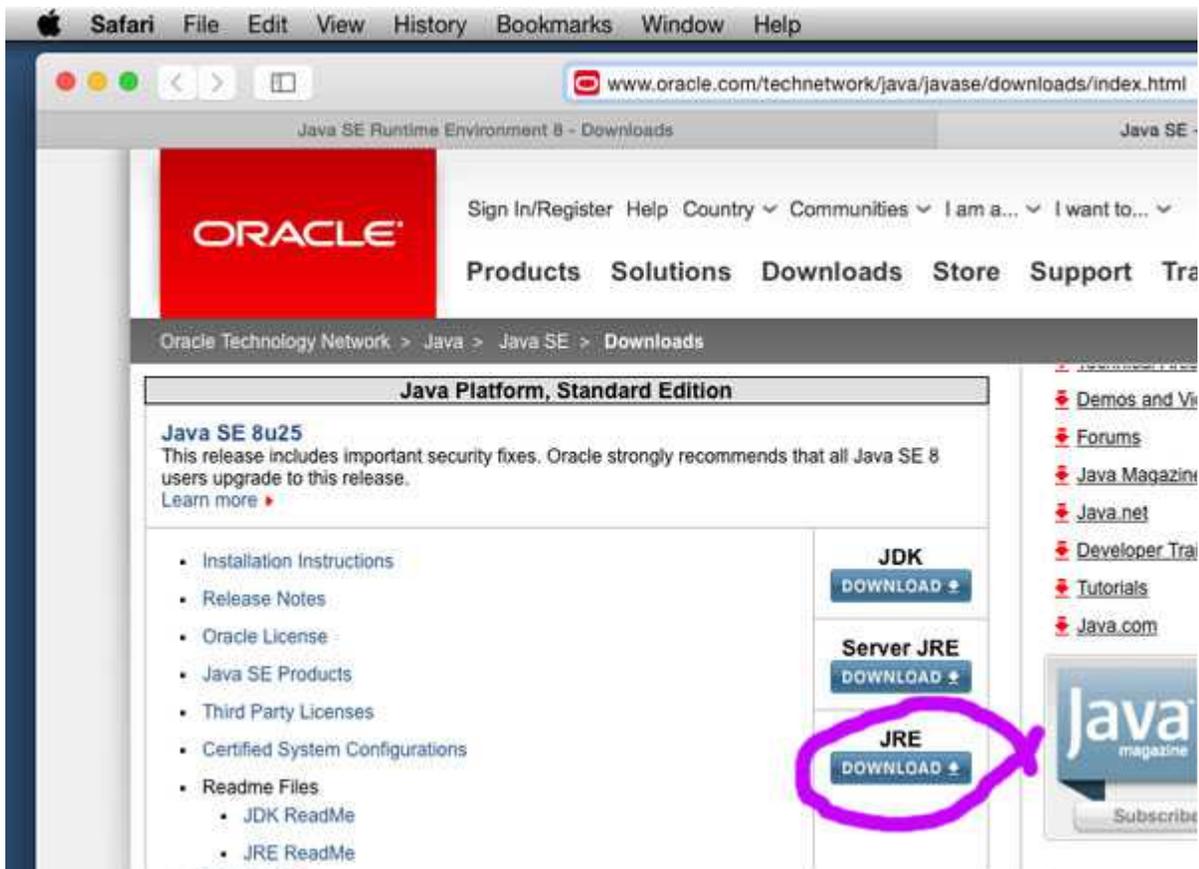
This is the link used by the current (at time of writing) Mac "button" shown above.

It takes you to - see next page.

It takes you to -

You want the **JRE** so click that button (yes **I know** the earlier message from Apple says you want the **JDK** – but here they are incorrect, for **AlertHelper** you **only need** the **simpler** and **smaller** **JRE**).

You will now be taken to the **JRE** download page   -   see next page.

Please accept the License Agreement **(1)** and then **(2)** click the file name to download it. You want the entry that looks like -
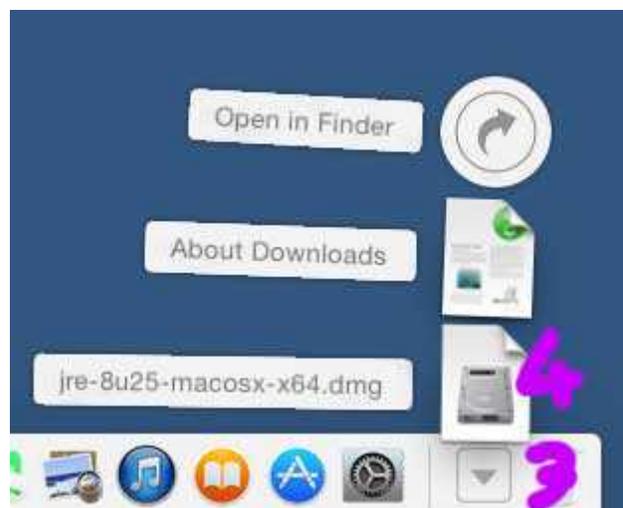
     MAC OS X x64   <size>   jre-XuXX-macosx-x64**.dmg**

the **dmg** at the end is **important** the tar.gz version is NO USE to you.

Now open (3) the downloaded list of files as normal and (4) double click the **dmg** file.

Now you can follow the normal Mac style instructions that will install Java on your system.

Permissions on a Mac

This can be one of the trickiest things when it comes to getting Java to run on a Mac. Particularly on Macs that are a few years old and have systems that range since Mountain Lion but before Mavericks.

So you have tried to run **AlertHelper** and you know you have Java installed but some message saying there is a permissions problem ...

Try double clicking first to check – if not then ...

Click on the jar icon in the normal way that will display the mouse button menu.

Click on **Open** in the **menu** as shown in the image.

A dialog will be displayed.

This is basicaly asking if you trust **AlertHelper** and its developer. This is sound question, you should not proceed unless you trust this software. This is true for any Software you are installing. Did you get this document from a reputable place?
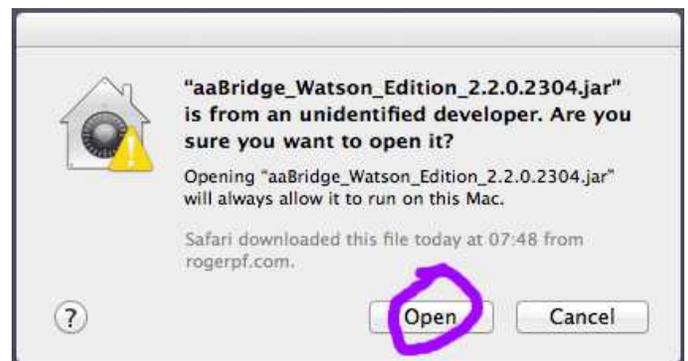
Has **AlertHelper** been recommend to you? Do you know people who use it?

If you don't trust it don't go any further – only proceed if you have decided that you can trust the **AlertHelper** program then –

Click the **Open** button   from now dbl-clicking the .**jar** file will start **AlertHelper**

Permissions on a Mac - need more help ?

If the previous page has not helped you all I can suggest is that you try <mark>**GOOGLE**</mark> with searches like.

    OSX java permissions

One thing to note – You are **not** interested in running **Java in your web browser**. Some people consider doing this insecure. Whether Java in a web browser is insecure or not is of no importance to you. **You do not want to do it**.

What you are trying to do is to run Java for a standalone Java program and that is 100% secure (so long as you trust that program).

Enjoy your Bridge

If you have read this far I do hope that this little **alert helper** application helps you to enjoy your bridge.

All the best

--
Roger