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DEADLINE FOR
ISSUE 25

SATURDAY
9th JULY

SPRING OFFENSIVE



A MONTHLY POSTAL DIPLOMACY ZINE FROM STEPHEN AGAR, 79 FLORENCE ROAD, BRIGHTON, EAST SUSSEX, BN1 6DL. TEL. 0273-562430, COMPU SERVE 100276,775. COST 3½P PER SIDE (60P UNWAGED, £1.20 ABROAD)

EDITORIAL

I suppose my personal big news this month is that I am coming clean and confessing that all being well Esme and I are expecting our first child to be born on or near 28th October. I await this event with some trepidation. Will *Spring Offensive* become a baby zine? Time will tell, but I can confirm that it is my intention (with Esme's support and encouragement) to continue with *Spring Offensive* irrespective of the impending presence of a small pink loud thing.

When I haven't been devising new and fiendish ways to privatise the Post Office at work, the past month has been mostly spent retrieving zines from people willing to donate their collections to the MidCon Collection - many thanks to Jeremy Tullett, Steve Thomas, Andy Bolstridge and Chris Tringham. Promises of future help have been received from (inter alia) Pete Birks, Richard Egan, Richard Sharp, John Wilman, Des Langford, Geoff Challenger and even Andy Bate. Apart from Chris Tringham's collection (which is very good on the 1978-82 period) all other zines received so far have been catalogued up to 1992 - though I'm still missing a lot of *Thing on the Mat*, *Greatest Hits*, *Y Ddraig Goch*, and *NERTZ* from the 1980s. Do any of you have copies of these zines that you are willing to surrender to what is after all a hobby resource?

I enjoyed what I saw of FurryCon 94 which was held at the Old Ship Hotel in Brighton over the Bank Holiday weekend. Although the Diplomacy Championship only managed two boards, that was still a 100% increase on last time and with work I hope to make it three or four boards next time. All in all more than 120 gamers attended FurryCon with *The Uninspired* (Marcus Pratt, Darren White, Steve Campbell and Chris Boote) winning the Intergame contest and Steve Jones picking up the Clive Mewse Memorial competition for the best individual performance. The Diplomacy championship was won by Martin Burgdorf, with Peter Berlin coming second as a result of the fact that I (in my position of tournament Director!) gave him some duff advice about the scoring system being used - Martin and Peter were trying to stitch up a 2-way draw between them, but the bad advice from me meant that they draw they agreed actually gave Martin a narrow victory. Ooops! Good job Peter's got a sense of humour.

WordDipCon IV approaches and I hope to see many of you there over the weekend of 23-25 July. See the Forthcoming Con listings for details. I would urge anyone who has not been to a Con before to consider a couple of days at WorldDipCon - the accommodation is not too expensive (if a little Spartan) but that is all more than made up for by the quality of the company and the long lists of games to play, tournaments to join and opportunities for eating and drinking to excess. If you're lucky you will have just had enough time to get over the experience by the time MidCon comes round in November. Speaking of which, I have been given provisional permission by Esme to attend MidCon even though we may have a 3-week old baby at the time. Obviously if the baby is late or there are complications I may not be able to make it - but I will try.

A few things are missing from this issue. Leuctra, Naxos and Cannibalism are on inserts, as should be Younstown if I can find Calum's orders (I know they're round here somewhere) - this is due to me running out of time to finish everything before this issue goes to print. Verona, Orchomenus, Heraclea and Yarmuk are held over for various different reasons. Chris Hardy sent me the latest *White Noise*, but I can't read Atari formatted discs, so I can't print it. To cap it all, the Avagadro report won't print. Aaaarghh! Why does everything happen at once!

Issue 25 next time - a quarter century. Time for a celebration - opinions on the first 25 issues are solicited for a retrospective issue. TTFN.

A Roundup of News & Zines

Greatest Hits No.184 was as entertaining as usual, bringing with it news that Pete has finally landed a job which repays his considerable talents with less than trivial sums of money. However, the back page of the zine (which was out of character with the rest of the zine) was very maudlin indeed, and announced that **Greatest Hits** is to fold in the sense that there will no longer be a printed paper publication, but some sort of zine will survive on email. But he doesn't seem too sure "I may return tomorrow with a printed **GH**. I may never return" and he ends the piece with the enigmatic "Enough. This was **GH** 184. I can promise you something soon, as soon as I know as I know I am safe." I certainly hope all is well in East Dulwich and that we don't lose a fine zine and a fine friend. If **GH** does disappear the postal Diplomacy hobby as it stands today will be more or less unaffected, but the world will be a poorer place. You can't say more than that.

Nothing to Declare continues to look promising, even though issue 14 did contain an attack on me from Kim Head, who repeats the same attack in **Gallimaufry** No.141. (By the way Kim, I've had more copies of your flyer than the cat's litter tray can reasonably cope with. Kim appears to assume that something is lawful just because a lot of people do it - is it lawful to drive at 80 mph on motorways? **Nothing to Declare** has a healthy letter column and a good bit of all round chat, some of it with a sports bias. Paul has lists almost full for Diplomacy (only one needed), Gunboat Diplomacy and Columbus as well as emptyish lists for several other games. Recommended. Paul Bennett, 103 Deleval Close, Newton Aycliffe, DL5 4QP.

After Tringham's recent computer problems **Megalomania** No.59 turned up on time, though Chris managed to spread six pages over seven sides as his word processor through a wobbly. **Megalomania** complements **Hobby News**, which Chris puts together with John Dodds, quite well. **HN** is a deathly dull listings zine (but still very useful) while **Megalomania** provides Chris's personal opinions on Life, television, Commuting & the Hobby. Talking of **Megalomania** those of you with long memories will remember that 10+ years ago when **Megalomania** was in its prime that Chris had a certain reputation for (allegedly) forgetting to post issues to his subscribers. So imagine my surprise when going through Chris's old zines with him to discover a copy of issue No.45 (back in 1982) which was addressed to Tony Hetherington and correctly stamped, which had been returned to Chris because he forgot to write an address on it. There was also a re-adjudication addressed to Tony Hawkins with both address and stamp, but which had evidently never been posted. So write immediately to Chris Tringham, 10 Jubilee Court, London Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR7 6JL and you too can be missed off a mailing list.

LIES No.21 was fairly chunky, even though a majority of the zine is taken up with game reports and postal rules for **United Nations**. I particularly liked the report on his trip to India by Richard Jackson ("It is a land of 1001 smells, mostly bad, but if you expect the worse it can only get better.") and the totally incomprehensible A3 map of Empires of the Middle Ages. Lists are open for Diplomacy, Arena and United Nations. Contact Richard Egan

at 23 Cleve Road, Knowle, Bristol, BS4 2JR if you want to play in what is proving to be the most reliable and frequent zine in the UK.

I enjoyed issue 5 of **The Spice of Life** put together by Miguel Lambotte and Jef Bryant - **SoL** is the official organ of the Belgian Variant Bank and includes lots of variant descriptions and descriptions of other PBM games, the rules to Banzai II, a survey of variants played by post in Europe, an update to the Belgian VB catalogue, a discussion on variant playtesting and lots of variant-related information. The cost is £1 and it is available from Jef Bryant, Rue Jean Pauly 121, B-4430 ANS, Belgium. This is the sort of thing that the UKVB should do. Speaking of which, James Nelson has announced that he would like someone else to take over the UKVB from him. Given my interest in variants (and given he has supplied my address as the contact point for queries in the interim) I have offered to look after the UKVB for him for 18 months, but as yet he has not replied to my email. If I was running the UKVB I would probably just use a page of **Spring Offensive** to catalogue updates etc. which would compliment the existing variant material in the zine. Anyway, whoever ends up running the UKVB will get my full support.

The results of this years Gladys Awards were suitably embarrassing with **Spring Offensive** picking up Best Zine and Best for Diplomacy and Variants with **Smodnoc** second in both category. **Spring Offensive** also picked up Best for Hobby News and Best Looking Zine. All this praise is very nice, but far too flattering - I await the backlash with some trepidation. Neil Duncan also had a good showing with Best Lettercolumn and Best GM, while **Smodnoc** got Best for Other Games. **Cut & Thrust** deserves an honourable mention for Derek's two second places and one third. 48 people voted.

A big welcome to **On The Game**, a new zine from Paul Cockayne of 18 Henry Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 7NA. On The Game is taking over two of the **Smodnoc** sub-zines, namely John Colledge's **The Blue Nosed Special** and David Tittle's **Novelty**. Lists are open for Diplomacy, the Crossword Game, Bus Boss, Acquire, Fictionary Dictionary, Railway Rivals, Best the Boss, Blow Football, Mornington Crescent, Designer Dice, United and many more. No doubt a SAE would elicit a free issue. If this sounds like your sort of zine then write off to Paul now!

Even the mighty are falling these days. The legendary 24hr turnaround of **Smodnoc** is no more for Toby has announced that he will be taking a week to turn round in future as he starts to take things easy while he heads off for retirement. One of the few zines not to have a nasty letter from Kim Head about me - there's always next time I suppose. As many of his subzines are either calling it a day or jumping ship, **Smodnoc** will soon just be a shadow of its former self.

I couldn't let this issue about a mention for **The Cunning Plan** No.17. You'll have to get up a lot earlier than that to make me fall for the old dummy page routine Neil! Though I have to say that I thought the special Agar edition was less of a parody than you probably intended.

THE THINGS THEY (ONCE) SAID

This is the beginning of a new series where I publish some a quotes from well known hobby celebrities and you try and guess who said it. Try your luck with these two quotes...

(1) "...the party should say, yes we are for the nationalisation of the Banks and the Finance industry, yes we support unilateral nuclear disarmament, yes we seek a major redistribution of wealth from the 7% who hold 84% of this countries wealth, yes we are going to break up multi-nationals within Britain, yes we are going to re-unify Ireland, yes we are going to ban private health care as it leaches resources away from the NHS, yes we are going to invest in our housing stock and not nuclear fission plants, yes we are going to clean up our environment and not defend ourselves against a hypothetical enemy. Yes we are... [etc. etc.] If this sounds a little revolutionary then so be it. Up the Revolution!"

Clue: the person involved is now a Liberal Democrat activist.

(2) "I am not liberated, and would no more want a female bridge partner or chauffeur than a male secretary (or a male wife)."

Clue: the person concerned is now well know as being half of a husband/wife bridge partnership.

FORTHCOMING CONS

SUMMER STABCON

Will take place at Wolton Hall, Manchester over the weekend of 1 - 3 July 1994. Features board games, role-playing games and wargames, and if the weather is good there will be an area for foam and steel weapons and a live action tournament. As the event takes place in and around a bar, you must be 18 or over to attend.

Rooms are £16 per person per night, or £21 if you want breakfast as well. You must pay a £5 per night deposit on booking, and the remainder on arrival. Registration is £5. Cheques should be made payable to Stabcon and sent to 17 Davenport Park Road, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 6LU.

MANORCON 12/WORLD DIP CON IV

Will take place at Birmingham University from Thursday 21 to Monday 25 July. Accommodation is £19 (sharing) or £20 (single) per person per night and registration is £5 per day or £15 for the whole 5 days.

The WorldDipCon Diplomacy championship will consist of five rounds, the one on Saturday also being the World Team Championship. Other events include the Railway Rivals world championship, United world championship and tournaments of Acquire, 1830, Outposts, Kingmaker, bridge, croquet, Rostherne games, Speed Circuit and Intimate Diplomacy. Francis Tresham will be running several Hartland games and demonstrations.

For more details, and to register, write to Richard Walkerdine, 6 Honeybourne Way, Wickwar, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire GL12 8PF (Phone 0454 299073).

TRINGCON

Organized by Alan Parr (6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Herts HP23 4DN), this is a small informal event for up to thirty people on Saturday 24 September in Tring. To register, send a deposit of £2-£5 to Alan. The total cost will be under £10 (including lunch).

ESSEN GAMES FAIR

20 - 23 October in Essen, Germany. The largest games event in the world, featuring Intergame, the European card and board game championship for teams of 4. More details from Friedhelm Mertz, Alberichstr, 15-17 Bonn, Germany (Phone +49 228 342273).

MidCon

November 18-20 at the Royal Angus Thistle Hotel, Birmingham. Room rates are £26 per person per night (sharing) or £32 (single). Registration is £8 until 31 August, after which it will rise to £10. Brian Williams, 30 Rydding Lane, Millfields Estate, West Bromwich, B71 2HA.

Features the National Diplomacy Championship, remaining qualifying events for which include: London (4 September), and Woodbury near Exeter (10-11 September). For details contact the national co-ordinator, John Dodds, at 55 Leigham Vale, Streatham, London SW16 2JQ (phone 081 677 3287, or e-mail jdodds@cix.compulink.co.uk).

MASTERCON 2/EURODIPCON 3

The location is the Kings Head Hotel in Circenster, Gloucestershire, and the dates are Friday 24 to Sunday February 1995. Registration is £10 per person, with a special concessionary rate of £5 for non-UK residents, and hotel rooms are £23 per person per night sharing or £25 single.

To register, send £10 (or £5) to Shaun Derrick, 313 Woodway Lane, Walsgrave, Coventry CV2 2AP.

HOBBYMEETS

BRISTOL: The Knowle (Back Bar), Leighton Road, off Priory Road, off Wells Road. 1st Friday of the month. Paul Norris (0272 427061) Richard Egan (0272 774460)

EXETER: Thatchmeet at the Mount Radford on Magdalen Road on the 1st Wednesday of each month. Rob Mulholland (0392 494072).

FAREHAM: Richard Williams (0329 236125) organizes a get-together at his house, on the 2nd Sunday of even-numbered months from 10 am.

HERTFORDSHIRE: Semi-regular meetings on Monday and Friday evenings to play games in place such as Hoddesdon, Tring and Hemel Hempstead. Alan Parr (0442 824173) or Martin Draper (0992 460117)

LONDON (1): The Royal George, Eversholt Street, near Euston station, 3rd Wednesday of the month. Contact Vic Hall (071 326 0125) or Mike Allaway (081 863 6413) for details.

LONDON (2): The Small Furry Swiggers meet at the Royal Oak in Regency Street, Westminster every Wednesday from 6.30. Costs £2.

The **NOTTINGHAM & DERBY** Board Games Club meets every Thursday from 7-10.30 pm. Contact Mick Haytack on 0332 511898.

NORTH YORKSHIRE: Tap & Spile, Monk Bar, York, on the 2nd Sunday of the month, at noon. Contact Iain Bowen (0904 640095) or Pete Sullivan (0325 364153).

OXFORD: Every Wednesday during term-time at 7.30 in the nuclear physics building off Keble Road. All welcome. Details from Mark Stretch Flat 23, Stevens Close, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JW (term) or 2, Over Mill Drive, Selly Park, Birmingham B29 7JL.

RIPLEY, near Woking: Usually 2nd Tuesday of the month, but can vary depending on availability of regulars. Starts with a curry and moves to a pub. Contact Dane Maslen (0483 721856) in advance to check on dates.

The **SHREWSBURY** Games Club meets every Sunday from 2.00 pm to 10.00 pm at The Lodge, Monkmoor, Shrewsbury. More information from Mark Kennett (0743 361417).

HOBBY SERVICES

The Finishing Touch is produced by Richard Sharp, Norton House, Whieldon Street, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 OHU. The results of all Diplomacy games played in the UK: an invaluable source of reference for statisticians, or to find out something about your opponents

The Novice Package provides a large amount of useful information for those who are new, and not so new, to the hobby. Includes a 56 page booklet with articles on playing Diplomacy and other games by post, a glossary of hobby jargon and pen pictures of hobby personalities, plus a number of sample zines and addresses for hobby services and zine editors. £2 from John Dodds, 55 Leigham Vale, Streatham, London, SW16 2JQ.

Zine Bank: Send a large (A4) SAE stamped for 200g to John Dodds, (address above) and he will send you about half a dozen different zines.

Mission from God lists all the zines in the hobby, with information about prices, sizes, frequency, etc., together one or more brief review to give a flavour of what the zine offers. £1 from Peter Sullivan, 55 Brunton Street, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4EN. Next issue late July.

Ipsos - Endgame Statements

Game: 1992DI - Ipsos. Commenced: *Spring Offensive* No.4 (September 1992). Finished *Spring Offensive* No.22 (April 1994).
GM: Stephen Agar.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	Result
AUSTRIA (John Etherington)	3	4	3	0	-	-	-	-	-	7th
ENGLAND (Tony Hastings)	3	4	5	5	4	5	3	2	0	5th
FRANCE (Paul Ridout)	3	5	6	6	6	3	2	2	2	=3rd
GERMANY (Richard Williams)	3	6	6	8	10	10	16	15	19	WINS!
ITALY (Ian Hinds)	3	4	4	7	7	10	9	12	11	2nd
RUSSIA (Dave Allen)	4	4	3	1	0	-	-	-	-	6th
TURKEY (Mike Gallie)	3	5	6	7	7	6	4	3	2	=3rd

RICHARD WILLIAMS (Germany) Winner

A shame that virtually everyone threw the towel in, even if victory was almost a certainty. It would have been nice to have battled for the 18, rather than have them handed on a plate.

When the game started I only knew John (Austria) and as he took an early bath my chances grew, as the others were inexperienced. Since the start of the game I have met Tony (England), Paul (France) and Dave (Russia). The biggest single problem was Mike (Turkey). When the game started he lived in Czechoslovakia and less than 50% of my letters apparently got through, so I gave up writing. When I needed Mike at the end, Stephen didn't give his new address despite regular requests. I had a less than 50% success rate when I knew where he was, so what hope did I have with the country split into two! As it turned out, being out of communication didn't matter. [SA: I don't recall any query about Mike's address, as far as I know he never moved and everyone knows that Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic]

When the game began I was eager to have my favourite Anglo/German alliance. I could not have had a keener ally than England. Unfortunately Tony seemed to forget that I was part of the alliance and wanted all the centres himself. Tony was a little upset when I implied he was thick. He kept thinking he had great ideas. They were great ideas for England but I was getting nothing.

Tony had this amazing knack of demanding his plan, I repeatedly refused, then two days before the deadline he agreed with me. By which time I had decided to poke at him, so many times I used his late decisions as the excuse for my little attacks on him. With Russia trying to get everyone at each others throats, I used this to my advantage and had a great start. I learnt how to handle England and my only problem was France. Unfortunately for Paul, he was the only one who wanted to attack me, so after early success he was quickly pushed backwards.

Austria and Russia were both heading for early baths, although I did offer Russia a lifeline - instead he chose to commit suicide. I was prepared to keep him going as a front line against England. It was the only chance he had of survival. Quite unbelievably he sent my letter to England who forwarded it on to me. The result was that Russia got immediately knocked out. I rarely encounter people who forward letters on, let alone when it is their only chance of survival they send the letter to the person that would need to be attacked.

I also had a stroke of luck in Autumn 1903 when England decided to go by the map as printed in *Spring Offensive*, which had my position marked on it incorrectly. I didn't tell Tony this which was to help enormously. I knew he was going by the map rather than the game report, as he was at my place when we planned what to do! What happened was that I could trash one of his units, the vital A(StP), knowing that it couldn't be retreated, as the map position suggested

that I couldn't dislodge it. Tony was not amused at the outcome as I controlled the North Russia / Scandinavia area as a result.

By now I'd convinced England into destroying France, while conning him over my activities in the north. My only concern was Italy. Ian (Italy) was already discussing a 17 - 17 split, which I played along with. I was only interested in winning though. In case Italy got ahead, I was regularly writing to England and France, in case a stalemate line was required. I openly told them both I planned to stuff them, but should Italy look like winning, I would immediately back off and form a line.

Nothing actually went wrong. Paul (France) played for survival, while Tony played very oddly. He should have sat in Iberia. Instead he decided to fight me, an impossible task and France ran into the vacated Iberia. Italy was not amused, he wrote to me informing me of what he thought of the others. Not many complimentary comments! Then promptly decided not to move again himself. I could have been stopped on 17 centres, had he got himself together with France and Turkey. I am sure France would have been willing, but the chances of doing anything with Turkey were so remote, I wasn't worried. In fact had Italy bothered he may have just done it with only France, but to just give up is astonishing.

To the players. I know John (Austria) is a good player when in the mood and I was glad when he got stuffed. This time he stood no chance. Dave (Russia) I know can play a lot better than he did here - now he is more experienced he does much better. All I found out about Mike (Turkey) was that playing from Eastern Europe was foolhardy. Tony (England) has, I hope, learnt a lot from this game. His enthusiasm is unquestionable even if his general play has much room for improvement. Tony, remember that an alliance is a partnership, where your partner may just appreciate a couple of centres themselves. Paul (France) did well in an impossible position. The only person to battle until the bitter end. Having seen him a few times I gather he attacked me because I was experienced! In hindsight not a wise move, although provided England agreed then I was going to attack France anyway. I would like to play against him again in more friendly circumstances. Ian (Italy) only appears interested when things go his way. I can understand his frustration with Turkey, but he appeared to make no effort to work with anyone else. Thanks to Stephen for GMing my first German win at the fifth attempt. Three of the previous four I was stopped on 17. My only regret is not being made to work for what turned out to be a simple win.

IAN HINDS (Italy) 2nd

I started this game believing that with Italy to play and no Diplomacy experience for 20 odd years that I stood little chance.

The Austrians were quite dismissive of my overtures, even hostile. I worked first to remove this direct threat. Austria seemed able to do

more damage to me than anybody else. I knocked Austria out in 1903 taking all 3 centres in one turn - some said it was luck!

The Turkish were never a problem other than their unpredictability and gunboat stance. I had by this time a solid French alliance and would have been happy to make it a permanent game winner. As time went by it seemed France was less friendly so I struck hard at this ex-friend. The net result was that what remained was so hostile that I had to finish it off. A couple of mis-orders and a lost set of orders led me to concede that Germany was now too far ahead to catch.

PAUL RIDOUT (France) =3rd

Congratulations to Richard for a convincing victory. Well done also to Ian Hinds for running in a close second.

At the outset of the game, once Richard had introduced himself and commented that he was participating in over 20 games of Diplomacy, I realised that he posed the biggest threat. I tried to get Tony Hastings (England) to join me (France) against Richard (Germany). All went OK until Spring 1903 when France supported Germany into Moscow and wrecked my plans of joint action against the Germans. England

declared war on France in Autumn 1904, bearing fruit for Richard's diplomacy!

As Tony proved untrustworthy I nurtured my alliance with Italy which worked well until I was stabbed unceremoniously in Autumn 1905 losing 3 centre in the process! This is how a stab should be done and it effectively put France out of the game. With Germany and Italy each with 10 centres it became a two-horse race, eventually Richard's experience paid off.

Well done Richard and thanks to all the others in an absorbing contest.

STEPHEN AGAR (GM)

I think Richard is a little harsh on Ian, who never gave up, it was just that his Spring 1909 orders were lost in the post, and as a result he thought there was no possibility of stopping you from winning. I suspected that Mike might find it difficult playing from Czechoslovakia, and the game might have ended very differently if he'd taken more of an active part in the game. Still, no dropouts, which is a relief. Congratulations to Richard on his victory and rather forthright endgame statement.

Gaugemala - A Late Final Statement

Chris Tringham (England) 5th

My initial actions in this game were influenced by the belief that Richard Sharp (Germany) was the strongest player in the game and that therefore Pete Birks (France) and I should resist the temptation to attack each other. We agreed that neither of us would move to the English Channel, and I turned my attentions to Walkerdine (Russia), co-operating with John Miller (Turkey) to attack him from both ends. This went reasonably well, and by Spring 1902 I was in St Petersburg. Simultaneously, I took Belgium with support from Sharp, but amidst great confusion in Autumn 1902 Richard moved in whilst I moved out. I felt at the time that I was slightly conned out of Belgium, and Richard also persuaded me against supporting John Marsden (Austria) into Moscow. With hindsight, this was a key point in the game, and if I hadn't allowed myself to be persuaded by Richard, I am sure the game would have had a very different result.

Then Italy and Germany joined in on the attack on France, and his resistance soon crumbled. I did make some effort to co-operate with Italy, but all I got back were a few postcards, and my tendency to leave everything to the last minute didn't help, particularly as I didn't have a phone number for Jeremy. I wasn't overly surprised when I was next on the Italy/Germany shopping list, and that put paid to my chances. I then signed my units over to Richard Sharp in return for the promise that he would keep me in the game, and watched as an interested spectator. I did read the letters from Richard, and kept an eye on the game - I thought that I would share in a 4-way or 5-way draw, and by the time I realised that this was unlikely it was too late. Incidentally, in my previous game of Diplomacy I signed my units over to Andy Bate, but eventually took them back (and we ended up

slugging it out before settling for a draw), so I don't regard these sort of arrangements as permanent or unbreakable.

John Marsden did make one or two rather half-hearted attempts to persuade me to change sides (John kindly made the offer that Jeremy would order my units for me), but Richard had cleverly left my units in positions where they were vulnerable to attack from him, so I needed quite a lot of persuading. John very nearly managed it, but when I talked to Jeremy at MidCon he seemed convinced that Richard was going to win anyway, and that made my mind up.

I think that Richard thoroughly deserved his win - he worked very hard, and came up with some very persuasive arguments at critical points. I never felt that my continued support was being taken for granted, and his reputation for telling the truth except in certain limited circumstances stood him in good stead.

Thanks to Stephen for his efficient GMing, and to the other players for making it a very enjoyable and interesting game (at least early on). All I need to know now is who was ordering which units.....

Postscript : Having read the endgame statements in *Spring Offensive* 23, it is clear that there was the opportunity to create an anti-Sharp alliance sufficiently early to stop him winning. All I can say is that I could easily have been persuaded to join such an alliance, but John Marsden was the only person who even tried to persuade me, and he didn't do a very good job. Jeremy was an obvious ally at various stages, but never seemed interested (though I will admit that I didn't try as hard as I might have done). John Miller and I had one exchange of correspondence and then got on with life at opposite ends of the board, and Richard Walkerdine was as enfeebled as I was for the most of the game.

ZINE PRINTING SERVICE

Andy Bolstridge is considering offering his services as a 'zine publisher. If you're an editor and would, possibly, be interested in having someone else print, collate and post your zine please get in touch with him. Likewise, if you're considering starting a zine but wouldn't otherwise be able to start up, Andy would love to hear from you.

turnaround for this would be quick, posted same day in most cases, zines could be sent via Royal Mail or e-mail and costs would be "competitive". Output quality would be immaculate, and Andy would consider typesetting your zine as well as printing it.

So if you are the least bit interested by this contact Andy on 091-232 4281 or at 42 Goldspink Lane, Sandyford, Newcastle, NE2 1NR.

To Be Or Not To Be?

by Stephen Agar

Consider the characteristics of a zine editor. He (or even she) is some one who spends anything from 20 to 120 hours a month, producing a zine (usually at a significant financial loss) mainly for the benefit of others. Of course, running a zine is a hobby as much as playing chess, going fishing or even indulging your passion for machine knitting, but it is also relentless. If you don't feel like going fishing any particular weekend you don't have to. But if you don't produce your zine on time you will feel that you are letting others down. So, the picture is of someone who has a hobby that they enjoy, but nevertheless a hobby which to an extent is out of their control, with time pressures imposed by the interests of others. In short, zines can dominate leisure time, even when you don't want them to.

Therefore, it is not particularly surprising that from time to time a zine editor is less than efficient and at some point they will fold the zine completely. Folds are less fashionable than they once were, in the mid-70s zines were lucky to make it into double figures, whereas today there are more zines in treble figures than single figures (!), but folds are of course an essential part of the postal games hobby, in much the same way in which death is an essential part of life. I've seen quite a few folds in my time (though not as many as some) and I've probably folded more zines than any other current editor (three at the last count) so permit me to describe the three common scenarios.

Le Fold Classique

The classic fold is when an editor suddenly decides he's had enough and takes responsible and appropriate action accordingly. Either the editor produces a final issue in which he says (for example) "*Perspiring Dreams is folding and this is the last issue for the present.*" (as in *Perspiring Dreams* No.41) or one month the zine just doesn't turn up, but soon afterwards the subscriber receives notification that the zine has indeed folded and either gets his subscription back or is notified who has taken over his game (E.g. my own *Pigmy*). In my opinion this is how all folds should be handled. Make a decision and stick to it, don't let your zine have a long and agonising death which results in both editor and subscriber feeling less and less satisfied with what is being produced. Doing a zine badly is worse than not doing it at all, because the morale of everyone involved will suffer.

One frequent signal that a fold is on the way is the Drastic Reduction Ploy, so beloved of editors who are in self-denial about the likelihood of them folding their zine. What happens is an editor announces that whatever he is going to do he is NOT GOING TO FOLD, but that the zine is all too much for him and all his problems will be solved if he can just slim the zine down a little. This is usually a sign that the editor concerned has mounting negative feelings about producing a zine which he explains away to himself on the grounds that it's just too much work, and therefore he convinces himself that if the zine is made more manageable his enthusiasm will return. This is rarely the case. A disinclination to produce a zine is usually a feeling that is too strong to be assuaged by jettisoning the letter column, the variants or the game of United. Although the size of the task awaiting the editor may indeed be too large to handle comfortably, once a zine has got too big it is not easy to cut it down to size quickly enough so as to lighten the editor's burden to any significant extent. I am not saying that cutting a zine down to size can never work, just that it usually doesn't, because in reality a feeling that the zine is too big is often symptomatic of a larger malaise.

A dramatic example of the slim down ploy is the false fold (much like a false start in reverse). This is where it all gets too much for the editor concerned and he announces that he is folding. However, after a while he regrets his decision, and so doesn't fold after all.

Once a fold has even been mooted, it is likely that the zine won't last six months. Mike Clarke openly considered folding his zine *Sidewalk* at issue 18, reconsidered and decided to soldier on, and then folded

at No. 21 anyway. Back in the 70s I announced *Pigmy* was folding in issue 29, but I changed my mind, yet folded after issue 32 anyway.

Fade Away and Radiate

Many editors seem to think that the responsible thing to do is to finish the games they've started albeit in a progressively anorexic zine. In my view they are mistaken. Forgive me for using a rather strained metaphor, but it is not responsible for a captain to take his crew down with the ship. Zines which slim down and don't pass subscribers en bloc to another zine inevitably lose the hobby players, especially as the slimmed down zine will rapidly lose its connection to the mainstream hobby (cutting trades, little non-games material etc.). Those subscribers not playing games will be the first to go, their enthusiasm diminished by the experience of the run down, though as they are more likely to see other zines the hobby may not suffer. The players are a different kettle of fish though (kettle of fish? I wonder where that comes from?) if they stay in the game they may be playing in the diminishing zine for many months and, if they are not already playing in other zines, they may indeed be lost for good when the game ends or the zine finally folds. A zine which is being run down in a sorry thing indeed which saps the very lifeblood from the hobby because those very games and players, placed in a new home, may help to render another (perhaps new) zine viable and hence contribute to the hobby.

Admittedly, some run-downs are better than others - Guy Thomas has certainly handled the gradual fold of *Realpolitik* very well, keeping some chat in the zine and maintaining a degree of regularity. On the other hand, since *Electric Monk* announced a run-down last autumn Andy and Maddi have only produced 3 issues and the last issue is months overdue. Other zines which have followed a similar path include *1901 and all that*, *Fall of Eagles* and *NMRI*.

The Disappearing Zine

The Disappearing Zine-fold is characterised by editors who simply let the gaps between issues get longer and longer until no one is quite sure whether the zine has folded or not. In extreme cases the zine can have been missing for over a year, but the editor concerned does not actually admit to having folded and there is no sight of subscriptions being returned (because to do so would be to admit yourself and the world in general that you've folded). This is without a shadow of a doubt the worst way for a zine to die and editors who behave in this manner are letting their subscribers down, because no matter how bad your personal problems may be, there is no excuse for not telling people what is going on. The most famous example of a zine disappearing into thin air was probably the fold of the now rehabilitated *Dolchstoß* in early 1980, but other recent examples of Disappearing Zines include *Garbage In, Garbage Out* whose editor Duncan Proffitt just disappeared into thin air, Mike Clarke's *Sidewalk*, the legendary Froggy (last seen March 1993) from Andy Bate (a member of the ManorCon Committee) and *NERTZ* (last seen April 1993). Other zines which are starting to display similar tendencies include *The Assassins Handbook* (one issue in seven months) and *Born Losers* (two issues in a year) - though as Edmund isn't running any games he can be partially forgiven. Often a zine which is on course for a gradual fade away will suddenly disappear, whatever the good intentions of its editor. It remains to be seen if *Electric Monk* is a case in point.

The sad thing about editors who indulge in such non-folds is that they will not admit to themselves that this is what they've done and the fact that they are often still in touch with the hobby means that the rest of us are really far too tolerant of their behaviour. It almost makes me come out in favour of a Hobby Organisation or some sort of Players Charter to the effect that if a zine disappears without explanation for (say) three months then the editor will acquiesce in re-housing their games. Games in Invisible Zines are the most likely to wither and die by virtue that there is often a long delay before the rest of the hobby