

# SPRING OFFENSIVE 68



*First Contemptible.* "D' YOU REMEMBER HALTING HERE ON THE RETREAT, GEORGE?"

*Second ditto.* "CAN'T CALL IT TO MIND, SOMEHOW. WAS IT THAT LITTLE VILLAGE IN THE WOOD THERE DOWN BY THE RIVER, OR WAS IT THAT PLACE WITH THE CATHEDRAL AND ALL THEM FACTORIES?"

PUNCH, OCTOBER 30<sup>TH</sup>, 1918

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**Spring Offensive** was a Diplomacy zine from Stephen Agar of 47 Preston Drove, Brighton, BN1 6LA

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## EDITORIAL

Don't panic, you haven't forgotten to get your orders in! I am writing to tell you all that I have decided to fold **Spring Offensive**, effective immediately. Well, there's no point in slow lingering deaths, is there? This is the fifth Diplomacy zine I have folded in a career spanning some 22 years, but this is definitely the one I will miss the most. I have been producing it for nearly 7 years - all of my married life. It's time for a break, recharge the batteries, and then on to challenges new.

All subscriptions will be transferred to Malcolm Cornelius's zine, **BUM**. Players in Anson and Anschluss who were getting the zine for free, will have £5 added to their **BUM** subscription by me. I will sub to every UK zine I currently trade with. All overseas trades are unfortunately cancelled. The list for the next Dip game is full, so I include a provisional gamestart - but please let Malcolm know ASAP if you don't want to play.

## GAMESTART - MARLBOROUGH

Austria (Keith Loveys) 32 Barkston Gardens, London, SW5 0ER

England (Pete Duxon) 3 Bentley Lane, Kiln Lane, Church Langley, Harlow, Essex, CM17 9PA

France (Paul Evans) 18 The Chase, Huyton, Liverpool, L36 5YN

Germany (Steve Ade) Hill Cottage, Hollow Lane, Chelmondiston, Ipswich, IP9 1HW

Italy (Richard Gee) 405 London Road South, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 0BJ

Russia (Gary Rolfe) The Old Chapel, Newfound, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG23 7HH

Turkey (Keith Smith) 194 Keir Hardie Way, Barking, Essex, IG11 9NZ

Please could you confirm with Malcolm that you are playing no later than Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April (day before Easter Friday).

## GAMES

The games will be dealt with as follows:

### Stephen Agar's Games

Game		New GM
ANSCHLUSS*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
ANSON	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
BERTHIER	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
CORNWALLIS	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
EUGEN*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
FOCH	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
GUSTAVUS*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
HASDRUBAL*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
IRONSIDE	Far East IR	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
JACKSON	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
KINGMAKER		Probably abandoned
KUTUSOV*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
LAWRENCE*	Email Dip	Stephen Agar by email / web site
MANEATER		Stephen Agar in <u>BUM</u>
VOTE	Variant	Abandoned
WIZZARD	Dip	Malcolm Cornelius in <u>BUM</u>
BREAKING AWAY		John Harrington in <u>BUM</u> provided you let send him a complete set of orders.

In the circumstances I don't see how Vote can continue. I will continue Kingmaker if at least 4 players expressly tell me they want to continue. If the players continue to send me their orders for Maneater, I will adjudicate and email the report to Malcolm for inclusion in BUM. Orders to me by 1<sup>st</sup> April 1999.

\*I will continue to adjudicate all email Dip games (with reports and maps on a web page) - so send the orders for Anschluss, Eugen, Gustavus, Hasdrubal, Kutusov and Lawrence to me as usual.

**Send order for all other games to Malcolm : DEADLINE - THURDAY 1<sup>st</sup> APRIL 1999.**

**Malcolm's address is 3 Greton Close, Victoria Park, Longsight, Manchester, M13 0YR**

**Malcolm's email address is: "Malc\_C@compuserve.com"**

If you have already sent orders to me, I will forward them to Malcolm - though if you want to be safe, send Malcolm a duplicate set, in case something goes wrong.

## SUBZINES

### Nick Parish's Subzine - Quality Jollity

Nick will be joining Serendipity as a subzine. I have sent Geoff Challenger £2 in respect of all players in QJ (in addition to their SpOff subs). **Send orders to Nick as by the deadline published in SpOff 67.**

### Tony Reeves' Subzine - Y Maes Chwarae

This will be reabsorbed into Tony's zine, **The Pen is Mightier than the Sword.**

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## CREDIT INFORMATION

The label below shows your name, address and the credit balance being transferred to Malcolm Cornelius.

### **REASONS TO BE FOLDING (Part Three)**

I have to confess that I wasn't intending to go into any details as to why I have decided to fold **SpOff** now of all times, a mere 4 months after winning the Zine Poll for the third time. However, I thought I did owe it to those of you have been with me some time (some from issue 1) to explain why I feel the way I do. My inability to make the zine as efficient as I would like it to be has been a source of frustration, and it is stressful trying to run a zine, while holding down a pressurised job and bringing up a small family. However, after issue 66 I really thought I was out of the woods. Indeed, at John Colledge's instigation a small group had got together via email to try and agree a strategy for promoting the hobby - something I had been trying to encourage for the previous three months. All in all I felt rather positive.

For me, the first sour note was Mark Wightman's intervention in the discussion - largely reprinted in **SpOff** 67. Although I don't think I had played a more prominent role in the discussion than anyone else, I was obviously the target of Mark's ire. Why that should be so, I am not sure, though I am sure it had nothing to do with the fact that **Sprouts** did not win the Zine Poll last year as some had predicted. He obviously still feels that I am the mastermind behind some plot, as in **Sprouts** 32 he is talking about me "taking us all over" etc. etc. Despite having been put right about my role in starting the email discussion (and not by me) and even emailing me to apologise for his tone, he just lays into me in his zine, betraying himself as the ignorant hypocrite that I have long suspected him of being. What he said to me in his email was "NFP", so I'm not supposed to print it. But what the hell, I'm folding, I can do what I like!

*Mark Wightman: "Firstly let me apologise. I have clearly upset you and despite appearances this was not my real intention. I hope you can forgive me my sniping. Being excluded from the initial discussion had annoyed me and now you have seen my response you can probably tell by exactly how much.*

*All of your points about having 'done' it all (CGS, adverts etc) before, are well made and are at the root of my reaction. I knew most of things had been done, by you and others, in the past. Which prompted me to ask- 'Why are a small group of people appointing themselves 'hobby saviours', when they can just go out and do these things anyway?'. Answering this question, I cast you in the role of 'dictator' obtaining a rubber-stamp for your plan. Sorry."*

Funny how some people's apologies are always NFP, isn't it?

So, I tried to put that behind me, but I confess it did make me feel pissed off. The next incident to sap my enthusiasm for this hobby concerned the letter I circulated last issue on behalf of John Colledge. Having completed **SpOff** 67, I looked at John's letter and noticed that some parts of it had been overtaken by events and were no longer correct. Unfortunately I then dared to make what I thought were uncontroversial amendments to a part of the letter which I had originally written myself and emailed to John as a suggestion back in February. I copied and circulated the letter, thinking I had done a good job. What was the response:

*John Colledge: Right folks! I am good and fizzing mad! So fizzing in fact I can't sleep and I am typing this at about 2-o'clock in the morning! No doubt by now you will all have received a copy of "my" letter to the zine editors? Please note the "my" as the letter that has appeared is not the same as the one I sent to Stephen. For starters mine was signed! Well, it seemed the polite thing to do! But it would appear that manners have gone out the window here. Is it too much to expect that you might have dropped me an e-mail along the lines of, "In view of the delay in completing **SO**, things have moved on and I have made quite a number of alterations to your letter. If you want to amend any of this let me know and we can discuss it"?*

In the interest of factual accuracy, the letter John had sent me wasn't signed, and I have now returned it to prove that fact to him. I admit that when I corrected the letter in the early hours of the morning, I did not email John and sit by my computer eagerly anticipating his response - I had a zine to get out. Fortunately, John Harrington (who is someone I have tremendous respect for) was more sympathetic when he wrote to me: "I was going to send a message to everyone on the list basically sympathising with your position over John's letter- people (even experienced subzine editors apparently) don't seem to realise how much last minute "one more heave" effort goes into producing a zine to a reasonably regular schedule. I decided not to (even before reading of your fold) because whilst it was obviously something JC felt he had to get off his chest it was of little interest to those of us (i.e. all of us!) who could not recall what he had originally written, and I did not want to extend the tedious thread any longer." Nice to know someone understands.

The spat with John made me feel even more depressed - you try to help and then you're taken to task for it. Anyway, I had three days in Brussels to cheer me up (attending a conference on postal liberalisation) and I returned to another email from Mark Wightman which said (among other things):

*Mark Wightman: "Missing quotes aren't the worst thing in **SpOff** #67, which I think is the most malicious issue of any zine that it has ever been my misfortune to read. Bringing up the Toby- Gihan incident in the way you*

*did is a perfect example. Light the blue touch paper and retire into your lair, no doubt sniggering. A low blow indeed."*

I freely confess, given the flak in the previous few weeks, this was the email which made me decide to fold. Within a few minutes I had emailed all the editors I know asking them if they could take on games. I just don't need this kind of shit from a hobby which is supposed to be relaxation and fun. I did reply to Mark, I said:

*Stephen Agar: "I really don't understand where you are coming from. Gihan emails all and sundry - which I didn't print because Toby said it was inaccurate and self-serving. Gihan then announces his retirement from the hobby. Toby goes to MasterCon and tells people what happened anyway (or so Pete Birks, who witnessed both the attack and was at Mastercon tells me). Are we supposed to keep the rest of the hobby in a state of ignorance or something? Let Gihan disappear in a puff of smoke and make no comment? Is there a conspiracy of silence that no one has told me about?"*

*I think what Gihan did was absolutely outrageous. If it had been reported to the police he would have received a custodial sentence. Toby could have died. I completely fail to understand how condemning such an action is "malicious"'*

To which Mark replies:

*Mark Wightman: NFP.*

Ah! NFP... if I can't print it, is it going to be an apology?

*Mark Wightman: No conspiracy, but Gihan, and more importantly Toby, had asked me (and others) not to print anything about the incident. I'm not surprised to hear that Toby was revealing all at MasterCon as he was incredibly drunk on the Saturday night. Whilst sober he certainly didn't want to talk about it, even to people who knew about it.*

*You said "I think what Gihan did was absolutely outrageous. If it had been reported to the police he would have received a custodial sentence. Toby could have died. I completely fail to understand how condemning such an action is 'malicious'"*

*I would agree, had the incident been intentional. Whether it was or not will have to remain a mystery as both parties were far too drunk to remember. Apparently Toby had no idea who it was (or what had happened) until Gihan told him in the hospital. The impression I got from talking to Gihan was that he didn't know what had happen either. One moment he was throwing a pint of beer over Toby, the next . . . Gihan seemed suitably horrified and frightened that he actually might have been trying to hurt Toby. I thought it best to give him the benefit of the doubt, under the circumstances, and hope that the two of them sort it out once the heat has died down.*

*Coupled with the digs about **Carpe Diem**, I just didn't think what you wrote helped any. If what you wrote wasn't intended as malicious then I better apologise now; because I have laid into you for it in **Sprout** #32 (at printers).*

Yep, another apology - and if I'd respected the NFP you'd never know.

So what did Mark say in **Sprouts of Wrath** 32? He said:

*"Sir Stephen always strikes me as one of those awful American preachers you occasionally see on TV. The ones who are forever stood in the pulpit, preaching their message for our salvation. The sort who asks us all to love one another, respect family values and keep the faith. Whilst they are secretly shagging the choir-boys, stealing from the collection plate and worshipping Satan. So it comes as no surprise to see his recent issue #67. Which, in my opinion, is by far the nastiest piece of work I've seen since joining the hobby. Superficially Sir Stephen appears to be all sweetness and light, but scratch the surface and you uncover a petty minded vindictive egotistical dinosaur of man. Strong words, I know, but there can be no excuse for his cowardly attack on Gihan or for his revealing the reason Gihan has dropped out of the hobby, and this against the express wishes of both of the principle parties. Stirring up trouble and then standing well back has always been his forte and I'm surprised people put up such blatantly cowardly behaviour. A few months ago Stephen thought about folding, getting as far as ringing John Marsden. Unfortunately for the hobby John was out. In all honesty I couldn't recommend that you subscribe to this 'zine, but it is well worth getting issue #67 just to see how low somebody will stoop to score points of other people. Mr Agar you are an loathsome egomaniac, who the hobby could well do without. (He loves me too)."*

I see. I am taken to task for my "cowardly attack" on Gihan, when there was I thinking that it was the person who got pissed, broke a glass in another persons face and then ran off to hide who was acting cowardly. Silly me, I guess sometimes I just forget to keep a sense of proportion.

So what should I, if anything, have printed? For those who don't know the sequence of events, immediately after the incident Gihan emailed all and sundry giving his version of events about how he came to glass Toby. This letter was obviously intended for publication. Toby replied saying "I cannot believe I am reading this because every sentence contains some warped or twisted account of events. One of the sentences is partially accurate and supported by the scar on my face. I would not consider this to be adequately accurate material that should be printed in zines which are read by people which neither of us have ever met." And who could disagree? There was no way I was going to print a description of events that the victim regarded as being so far from the truth. Gihan forwarded Toby's response to all and sundry and said: "I thought it best to get it all out in the open instead of inaccurate whisperings down the grapevine. Please could editors respect Toby's wishes and not print my e-mail." Quite. I did not print this original email which Toby had objected to.

What I did print was Gihan's email stating his reasons for dropping out of the hobby. It didn't say "NFP", it wasn't inaccurate, and no one had asked me not to print it. Apparently I was supposed to realise that I was only being told this in confidence (along with all other editors) and that it was not for me to tell you mere mortals why Gihan had disappeared. I assume ordinary subscribers were forever meant to puzzle about what had happened to that nice Mr Bandaranaike who used to write entertaining, if rather emotional, articles. Well, sorry - if you want me to participate in a conspiracy of silence, you should tell me first.

What did Toby have to say about it?

*Toby Harris: "I won't be mentioning the Gihan thing in **Fungus**, nor getting into any debate on what has gone on in other zines about it. I'm really not too bothered about it all now and was surprised (but not upset) about what you printed. So what, it's no big deal any more."*

I can't tell you what Gihan thought, as I acquiesced in his request that he shouldn't be sent any more copies of the zine. That said, I have no sympathy for someone, however drunk, who pushes a glass in a friend's face, however remorseful he feels later. I can't help but feel that if it was such an accident it is odd that he felt the need to run away at the time and then email half the hobby trying to justify himself.

But all this isn't the issue, is it? The truth is that these incidents over a short period of time, when I was feel down anyway, have been enough to sap me of all enthusiasm for this hobby. Mark Wightman shouldn't be allowed to take the full credit for this, though he will no doubt be pleased to get his wish granted so quickly. That said, Mark is a remarkably ignorant individual (as has been demonstrated on more than one occasion) who prefers to let rip in print without engaging whatever part of his brain it is which appears to function adequately. In the absence of any discernible wit with which to entertain, his only influence on this hobby will be negative and destructive. No doubt he feels he can make everything all right by sending "NFP" apologies. If anything is going to turn off newcomers to this hobby it is people like him.

So there you have it. The biter bit. I guess **SpOff** would have continued through to 2000AD if the circumstances above hadn't stressed me out, so I will have to forgo the pleasure of beating **Sprouts** and **Fungus** in the Zine Poll again - but hell, you can't have everything in this world. ☺

As many editors have said before me - "so long and thanks for all the fish."

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## **LETTERS**

### **Chris Tringham**

Thanks for continuing to send **SpOff**. I haven't seen **Dolchstoß** or **GH** for a long time (maybe because they are still being sent to my old address) and it is good to hear what is going on.

How are you and your family? I must catch up with you one day! Did I tell you Ada and I got married last month - it was a very low-key event!

*SA Congratulations! Married with a kid. Looks like that business trip to Honk Kong changed your life forever. Stay in touch - I still have that Elvis Costello 5CD live set for you.*

Good luck with all the hobby organization stuff - I have a terrible temptation to get involved, though thankfully I am thousands of miles away and too busy, so thankfully it is impossible. Having read the latest letter on your discussion forum I can see another reason - everyone gets so emotional about this stuff.

"Old" MidCon does have some money left (from our accumulated surplus plus the share of the Hobby Development Fund). You are more than welcome to have it, but there is a logistical problem - I don't have the cheque book with me! I hope to be back for a visit in June, and I could then write you a cheque and send it to

Doddsy for him to sign and forward to you. I could, but I will probably forget... If you can think of another way of getting hold of the money, let me know.

We did also agree with Theo and Paul when they took on MidCon that they would make a donation out of the surplus each year for the Hobby Development Fund, but they have probably forgotten about that. You could try reminding them. However, as you said, money isn't the real problem.

Isn't it a bit sad wanting a trophy for the Zine Poll? If I ever won the thing that's the last thing I would want! Am I supposed to have the trophy on display on my mantelpiece so that everyone can see how clever I am? No thanks - winning would be enough.

You are right that events such as Polycon and Geordiecon only had very small low-key Diplomacy tournaments. What Midcon did with the NDC (and Manorcon with the Universities Diplomacy Tournament) was to put more emphasis on Diplomacy, and encourage more people to play. This gave both events a focal point and boosted attendance, and it is now standard practice for all cons to have more organized events and some sort of timetable, and I think this encourages people to attend - because they can see what there is on offer, and presumably are interested in some of the events.

This seems a very positive development to me, and the fact that we now have a number of well-established conventions suggests that it works! The key point is at all of these events there is plenty of room for other things to take place, or for people to just lounge around at the bar. The advantage for anyone (you and me included) who wants to have a very relaxed (and Diplomacy-free) weekend are two-fold - firstly the cons take place, and secondly there are people there with whom we can socialise for at least part of the time. Without the Diplomacy tournaments (or, say, Intergame at Furrycon) many of the people we wish to meet probably wouldn't turn up at the event at all.

Baycon is something of an enigma (is it still going?) in that after being a fairly high-profile event in Torquay it became a very basic games-playing event on the Exeter bypass. It had (has?) a very loyal following, but it was pretty much wall-to-wall games playing last time I was there, and I don't think they were getting many new people along. The problem is that there is very little else to do there, and it certainly isn't like the old-style conventions that you and I remember so fondly.

You and I might want more of the old-style events, but the reality is that almost without exception they were badly-organized and probably lost a lot of money for the organizers, and so were not repeated. Had we continued in the same vein, I suspect that "the hobby" might have collapsed a long time ago. I am proud of what we achieved with Midcon, and hope that it has inspired other people to run conventions, which in turn has attracted people to the hobby and kept them involved.

### **Richard Sharp**

Well, I'm sorry to hear you're folding. Maybe it really is Armageddon after all, just when things seemed to be looking up a bit.

### **Geoff Challenger**

Odd. I'd thought you'd ridden out the early-year blues and the possible fold a couple of issues ago. Still I know myself that you sometimes wake up and a fold is just simply the most obvious thing in the world.

### **Toby Harris**

Why you are folding now of all times is beyond me. Maybe just drop a few games and then you can run (like I do) more of a chat zine than a games zine. It is so much easier.... why do you think I closed waiting lists 18 months ago !!! Anyway, your choice ... but wouldn't you just hate it if in the first year there's a trophy for the Zine Poll I won it? C'mon Stephen, can't you just offload some rubbish and keep things going at a slower pace ? Take **Fungus** ... just ready now, 15 days after the deadline. Nice and easy and the buggers can wait.

Well, so Sprouts upset you ... big deal. Zines sometimes do that. Now get off your arse, quit whinging and knock out another cracking **Spoff!** Sorry to sound so brutal but it seems clear to me that what Mark has said has upset you rather a lot and you're letting it get to you. You're too sensitive and shouldn't let it get to you. The hobby's number 1 always gets attacked ... it happens in regular Dip and it happens with zines. Nobody likes to challenge lower-ranked efforts. No doubt when Tyson was in prison there would be plenty of hardened criminals very keen to show they're 'ard by having a pop at him ... not totally dissimilar to what's happening here, if you'll excuse the simile. Time to get back up and show them what you're made of.

*SA I appreciate the thought, but this time I'm out for the count. Nice to find out who your friends really are, though.*