

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (February 1992)

Welcome to Volume One, Issue Twelve, of **The Mark Nelson Experience**.

PUBLISHER: Mark 'Crazy Markie' Nelson, 21 Cecil Mount, Armley, Leeds, WEST RIDING. LS12 2AP ENGLAND

Work (0532)-335175 (but I'm not often in my office so leave messages at your own peril) Home (0532)-637878 (best to ring between 10.00pm and 00.30am or before 10.00am) INTERNET amt5man@sun.leeds.ac.uk or amt5man@sun.ecusun.leeds.ac.uk

The Mark Nelson Experience is available for the "usual" (circulation this issue is 35). This zine contains Hobby discussion¹ and will fold with the September 1993 issue.

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"No, there isn't enough news and gossip to fill a global hobby magazine." *Mike Siggins*
Electric Monk 31 (*August 1991*)

How does the future look for the swedish PBM- hobby?

By *Joakim Spangberg*

Why have so many zines started in such a short period? Has there been a huge increase in the number of active players, or have the existing gamers become more serious? One thing is certain: two and a half years ago **Lepanto 4-ever** was the only Swedish zine and now there are more than fifteen. Indeed it's been said that Sweden has the highest number of zines per citizen in the world!

The Swedish hobby contains between 200 and 400 members, the older members came from wargaming groups and the younger from RPG games. At the moment there are no professional games in Sweden although there are a couple franchises from British companies, eg 'Isles of the crown' and 'Trolls Bottom'.

I hope to set up some sort of players register in Sweden and through that find out how long people have played, what made them join the Hobby and if they have tried to involve their friends in the Hobby.

I think that that the best way to publicise the hobby even more is through "the jungle- telegraph", but there are other ways, such as sending a zine to all gaming clubs.

I think that explaining what PBM is and why people play is the main difficulty with recruiting new postal gamers. If you don't understand what something is you don't care if it's fun or not. If we want to the hobby to grow fast we must learn to explain what PBM is in an interesting way. We must know how to answers questions as "But doesn't it take a very long time if you'll have to send letters back and forth?", or "But there can't be any advanced games if you'll send it by mail?".

Potential recruits are those who already play some kind of games, etc boardgames or role-playing-games. In order to increase the number of players in Sweden we should look towards these groups. Con's are the perfect occasion to spread information, but it's not enough to hold a small postal-meeting because that will only attract those who already know what PBM is: The first PBM meeting was held at LinCon in June 1992 and was held after a presentation by Shaun Derrick, sadly only 'well known' fans attended; I don't think there were a single newcomer there.

Who is most qualified to get the responsibility of organising hobby publicity? I think someone who has been within the hobby for a long time and is good at public speaking would be best. Maybe our postal hobby is too young for someone to want, or rather be able, to take that responsibility. Maybe we should

¹Actually it contains Crazie Markie writings about the Hobby.

wait before we start anything like that, but I am convinced that in the long term aggressive advertising is needed if the number of postal gamers shall increase beyond the couple of hundred that we are now.

Back to the title, "*How does the future look for the Swedish PBM- hobby*". I think that a number of zines are in danger of folding, mostly because of the lack of demand for zines. Some zines have already experienced this problem, such as **Coranex Creffa**. Many of our postal gamers are rather young and don't have a secure income so that they can only afford to buy a few zines every month. The fight over subscribers has become worse now that we have so many new zines. There are those who think that it's good that the 'crud-zines' fold, but I think it's a pity if zines fold when we need many 'faces' towards the outside-world. Everyone who can should buy many zines just to prevent that they folds. What is your opinion?

Your Letters

Halford Dace, 3 Rhodes Avenue, Westville 3630, SOUTH AFRICA. (23rd September 1992)

"Here it is — what the toady master's been waiting for! An explanation!"

"I'm afraid I must have sounded a right idiot on the phone last night — circumstances conspired to make me utterly incoherent, so I owe you an explanation:"

"11:30 or so arrived. My brain was blowing out on the more subtle wonders of biomembranes. I felt a deep urge to do something outrageous, and it was too wet to go jumping in front of cars, on top of which, someone had just paid me with 20 R2 coins. I had this idea I'd see if your phone was working — Like you said, it's nice to do it, just to hear someone's surprise. Anyway, I had a question for you (which I'll ask some time) and all my conversational wonders lined up. So I walked to the phones."

"To start with, the night guard was asleep next to the only one with enough light to see by — offputting. Then I made like the phonebook says and dialed the international operator. He said no, I can now dial direct from the new payphones. So I put the phone down on him, and start stuffing money. I got through to your place on the second try — great, but do you think the phone wanted to know about my money? The more I tried stuffing money in the slot the more it threw it out into the change tray ergo I was too busy money-stuffing to do any coherent talking. Toady apologises for the inconvenience."

"Well, for plusses, now I know what you sound like so I can read your mail correctly, and I have enough money left over to mail **SAPC #1**."

"Finally, I have to go into FIJAGDH mode for the next few days. I've really and truly got to get to grips with biomembranes, derived lipids and lipid metabolism, so you can breathe a sigh of relief and extract yourself from the sun for a few days. 8-) < croak >"

"Oh well, off to another lecture. 45 minutes with a lecturer who's both boring and sexist. She does 45 minutes of dictation, usually involving in some way things like 'sex determination in man'."

Crazy Markie Agh. Happy memories of the time I rang Andrew England (the first time I'd rung overseas)...

Per Westling, c/o Lindh, Drabantgatan 11, S-58346, Linköping, SWEDEN. (5th November 1992).

"You say in the September issue of **TMNX** that you hope Mark Boyle will find his way to the 'mainstream' of the hobby; but I wonder why? I think it is nice to have 'interesting' people even in 'back water' hobbies. A hobby consisting of, for example, 13 year old boys would be a waste, better to have some 'good' influence in it. And what is so good with **SF** fandom anyway? I get more and more angry on some of the 'fans',

because they are often narrow minded and also too fanatic! If it isn't 'Blake 7' fanatics, it's 'Anti-Fantasy', 'Roscoe' or 'Ann Rayn' fanatics. Sigh!"

CRAZY MARKIE: What's so good with SFdom? Their best fanzines are extremely well written and very interesting, much better than anything in dip fandom. (eg *Mimosa* and *Stet.*) SFdom is factionalised, but it's a large, diverse, grouping — I am not particularly interested in Media Fandom or the Sercon sections of SFdom; is there any difference between the above and dipfandom vs postal mathematics, fannishness vs turbophreakness?

Doug Kent, 54 West Cherry Street, #211, Rahway, NJ 07065. USA (6th November 1992)

"Hey, moron. Next time you plug my zine in the 'Mark Nelson I Have No Experience', try getting my address right! It's 54 West Cherry, not 43 West Cherry! I know any number over 12 is hard for you, but please, a little extra effort is appreciated."

CrAZy MArkIE 8- (Will you ever forgive me?

Per Westling, c/o Lindh, Drabantgatan 11, S-58346, Linkoping, SWEDEN. (6th November 1992).

"There are excellent zines in several hobbies. I only see few Swedish SF zines nowadays and they are not really that good. Maybe I will go overseas in the future. Although I'm more of a faan nowadays."

"Maybe it is natural for fans to be fanatical? But there are those people who read literature like SF for its mind-opening perspective? And read it with an open mind? I count myself to this group (the open-minded one) but I think it is a minority, which is not surprising as this is a minority group in the society at large. Maybe that 'quality' make for a 'bad' fan as well, not being fanatic I mean?"

Adrian Appleyard, 254 Padstow Road, Eight Mile Plains, Qld 4113. Australia. (2nd November 1992).

"I noticed you slipped your own name into the 'impressive collection of power names...'. Surely you're not going to stray from the required 'No guys, I don't really do all that much for the hobby. Really' — false-humility that all big names in the hobby go on with? Shocking."

"With regards to 'open-ended' tournaments — I'm all for them. I think this is the way Dip should be played. The only problem is that it's a real bitch to do this. I also think that it would change the tournament scene a great deal and that games would be more 'stable'. I have only been to two tournaments (which completely wipes out any credibility I might have in arguing about 'Top Boards') but at both the games have been about making a mad dash for centers at the end of the game before time runs out, or stalling the leader until time runs out. I've seen a few games which were 'saved' from a win by a time draw. If a player *can* win, they should be given enough time to *do* it, preferably rubbing everyone's face in it along the way. That is **DIPLOMACY!**"

Jack McHugh, 280 Sanford Road, Upper Darby, PA 19082. USA, (8th & 11th November 1992).

"Markie, Markie, Markie, how many times have told you not to listen to that nasty Iain't Bowtie. He just fills you with all of these wrongheaded ideas. Now be a good toady and stop listening to him."

"We called it 'proxy voting' in the DipCon amendment because it doesn't necessarily have to be via the postal service. It could be by phone or e-mail as well. So the correct term is proxy voting. Now that you've heard this from me you can correct all the other Brits. No, don't thank me now, just send money (real American money too, not the multi-color European junk.)"

"I agree that it wouldn't be too hard to distribute a DipCon Site Selection Ballot Form as you wouldn't even need to send it through the pubbers. Our original solution was to send a ballot out to anyone who had attended DipCon in the last three years: You had to attend at least once every three years to vote and it is very easy with a database program to eliminate the overlap."

"There are supporting memberships of DipCon, they are called registration. I don't think that anymore than that is necessary. I thought that the fee last year of \$30 was way too high for registration, but that's another issue. I would say a nominal fee of \$5.00 would be something I might support. Of course, that could be waived if asked."

Crazy Markie Agh, but DipCon registration isn't really a supporting membership. It's full membership. By supporting membership I mean that a scheme where you pay \$5 (say) and get sent all the PR material and the Con booklet(s). But if you want to attend the con you have to convert to full membership.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk, actually contradicting me on WDC. I see that bloody Welshman Bowtie behind this one. Just stop listening to him, Markie. I tell everyone your my toady and now you go and defect to Iain't. Be good or I'll send Larry Perry and Melinda to the next ManorCon with orders to spend the whole time with you. I think WDC isn't important because very few can afford to go. Let's get real here, how many people can afford to travel off continent, i.e. Europe to the US, Australia to the US, etc.? Not many so how many people will actually attend World DipCon outside their home continent? Hardly anyone. But I do find the discussion amusing, keep it up."

CRAZY MARKIE But Jack about *15* non North-Americans went to World Dip Con II in 1990. That's 15 people who wouldn't have gone without the WDC tag. I don't know how many went to North Carolina (David ?) but the overseas attendees must have been around 10% of the total.

"Did you see my comments in **Y Ddraig Goch**? (By the way, I gave him a little class finally don't you think? Of course, you do, but you're my toady.) I clearly believe that the US hobby is much larger than the rest of the world. We have the most zines, the most cons, and the most active hobbyists. I don't buy this crap about ManorCon being larger than DipCon so that means the UK hobby is bigger than the US. Clearly if you compare Origins, which is what ManorCon really is, with ManorCon, the Origins is much bigger. Do the British have a hobby census, the Sack Kent is working on the latest one for the North American hobby. We had close to 800 active hobbyist on the last one, i.e. getting or playing in at least on US/Canadian zine. How about you guys? What's the British figure?"

Crazy Markie The last British census, by Jan Niechwiadowicz in January 1990, was based on people playing games rather than sub lists. Still there were 802 people in Jan's list: two more than the last North American census. Is the US hobby much larger than the rest of the world? I think not.

"I still don't believe many will go overseas and to compare going from the UK to France or vice-versa with going to N. America or Australia is really ludicrous. I'll see it when I believe it."

"Comparing our little Dip Hobby to the SF hobby is a farce Markie. They have hundreds of thousands, even millions of fans, we'd be lucky to crack 10,000 active hobbyists world wide. I recall their being no more than half a dozen Aussies and half a dozen from the UK at WDC II, was I wrong?" ((Yes! -CM.))

"Robert Sacks isn't published because he isn't liked. Geez, Markie, do I have to tell you everything? I guess that's why your the toady and I'm the Master! To get NYGB funding all you have to do is agree to uphold a certain set of principles and then you can get funding. The problem many hobby members have is that if you agree then the NYGB has the right to remove you if you aren't doing your job to its (i.e. Robert's) satisfaction. That almost never happens and it is to protect hardworking hobby custodians from feud oriented challenges. Robert will usually let a person name their successor if they can find one, usually just finding one is the problem, anyone. And yes Robert can kick you out if you're not doing the job to

Robert's satisfaction, but he is very leanient. Trust me, Brad Wilson works for him."

CRAZED MARKIE So the NYGB protects Hobby Custodians from crazed feud-orientated challenges. Can you actually name any crazed feud-orientated challenges, aside from those coming from Robert?

"You have to agree to the NYGB rules, the dreaded Covenant, to get the money. If you don't, you don't get any money. Tom Swider is the Registrar of Projects and he publishes the list of who is certified every so often in his zine, CIA. I have to get the info from Robert and I will and pass it on to you by next year. Robert does give out the info on the spending, but the doesn't have a zine so he just mails it to those of us who work for the NYGB."

"Most of Roberts info is as exciting to read as a ledger. Ask the Sack to print it. He's the pubber, not me. Robert's expense sheets don't appear because they are dull. I agree that Robert can be a bit too loyal to friends, but he isn't the only one guilty of that. Robert will generally remove someone if he gets multiple complaints but he usually doesn't. Usually people want someone removed IMMEDIATELY and then feud with Robert when he doesn't remove people immediately. Jawn wrote an interesting letter on some of this stuff for the next issue of ATHYRIO. I believe that the MNC has been constantly challenged both under Julie Martin and Brad Wilson. I think there have been several overseas as well as Canada."

"Yes, Robert must approve of the successor to any NYGB funded project but Robert isn't likely to veto anyone unless he has a successor. If Robert vetos your choice and he doesn't have one, he, Robert, gets to do the work."

"The NYGB funding rules have something to do with the IRS and being a not-for-profit corporation. I don't understand it all but Robert has explained it to me in the past. Basically since Robert is CEO of the NYGB he must ensure that the office is being carried out according to the charter of the NYGB or the NYGB can lose its status as a not for profit organization under the tax code. Since Robert gives out the funding he must certify each office and officcholder."

CRAZED MARKIE: Wouldn't it be better to change the Charter so that you didn't have to make all these checks?

"Now, now, my boy, do I have to tell you the error of your ways? The mere fact that I think Iain't Bowtie is bad for you should tell you something is wrong. The very fact that you ask such a provocative question shows how right your Mother and I are to make sure you lead sheltered life."

"Re: CanCon. Cal did wave bye-bye but failed to provide either women or booze for the trip home. What a welcher, eh?"

"Re: the Runestone Poll and former custodians. No, I don't have a rational as to why they shouldn't be in on the Poll. I suppose they could be included, but that is why Linsey (or at least part of the reason) does so well every year."

MARKIE Yes Jack. BruX does well in the Poll every year because he used to run it. Do you think he hacks into Eric's computer ot do people just say 'Oh, I must vote high for BruX because he used to run the Poll don't you know'?

"BruX is a really wonderful guy who just happen to turn the entire US/Canadian hobby against him."

CRAZY MARKIE You mean the members of that well respected organization the NYGB? If the whole US/Canadian hobby hate him how come he always used to do so well in Polls?

"Now stop all this 'free' talk and be a good toady. Don't talk to Iain't anymore — he's bad jiujiu for MaRKie!"

“Well, shucks, I think Ian’s real swell too (does this mean he and Tom Swider will tie me down and spank me if I’m not good?).”

Joakim Spangberg, *Distansgatan 19, S-50246 Boras, SWEDEN*, (12th & 16th November 1992).

“SF fandom is something I have been advised several times to get involved in but it seems to me that there are a lot of conservative people within SF fandom giving newcomers a hard time (at least that is the picture I’ve got of the swedish hobby). And besides, the postal hobby takes already too much time, so...”

The Crazy One The Swedish SF hobby seems to be very feud orientated...

“Another thing I’m going to follow is how **EUROPA 2000** will manage the move from Germany to UK. Should not be too difficult when the zine already is written in English.”

“As a postscript to my article I should say that the average zine in Sweden is published every 4-5 week and costs \$3. The size is A5 and the numbers of pages is 40-60. The front page is printed in coloured paper and has a coverpic by an subscribing amateur artist. Most zines runs a lot of Diplomacy and variants. United and Railway Rivals are also populars.”

NEWS & VIEWS

Iain Bowen has recently cut almost all of his trades and intends to run **Y Ddraig Goch** warehouse style until October when he will attempt to add the letters/chat and restart a limited trading policy. The stated reason for this abrupt change in style is cost: “I have been paying about £72 of the cost of each issue. I’ve also been overspending in other areas and whilst I’m not broke yet — if I don’t make economies soon — I soon will be. Economies have to be made; this is but one of them.” (**Y Ddraig Goch** 69 (*February 1992*)).

Why has universal trading declined? There are many reasons and one reason is simple because the trend has gained momentum. As fewer and fewer zines traded universally (or as near as they could get) there was less and less pressure on new editors to trade universally. The result? An ever decreasing number of editors trading universally.

And if you’re not going to trade universally what then? Why trade with zines that you don’t read? Why trade with zines that you don’t enjoy? Why trade with more than a handful of zines? The decline in *universal trading* has been followed by a decline in *trading*.

I could offer a number of reasons for this change but the simple answer is cost. The change from mimeograph to xerox has increased the costs involved in pubbing. Editors haven’t raised their prices in line with the increased costs, zine prices have remained low. The end result is that losses are greater.

The hobby seems to be less cohesive, but is it? How many zines ever carried more than one page of Hobby news? How many hobby members are interested in Hobby news? Could it be that in the past we were fortunate to have a handful of editors who were interested in the concept of a unified Hobby and promoted the idea? **Mad Policy**, **Zeeby** and **Home of The Brave** stand out as zines which helped promote the idea of a unified Hobby for most of the 1980’s. But what of other zines from this period? Did they cover more, or less, hobby news than zines today? The answer is... the answer that this remains an open question. After all, how many zines do you need to see in order to pick up most of what’s happening in the hobby?

What has happened is that there are fewer editors who are able to pass comment on what’s happening around the hobby. Fewer editors with the background and understanding of the Hobby. It may be that the 1990’s is the last great adventure of the ‘hobby publisher’. The future belongs to the turbophreak, the teddy bears and those who enjoy postal mathematics. But before we drown in a deluge of crud zines we can unite for one glorious last stand in an attempt to rekindle the flame of Camelot and the days of the last high holy fen...