

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (April 1992)

Welcome to Volume One, Issue Two, 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 and a foreign student normally answers the phone so leave messages at your own peril) Home (0532)-637878 (best to ring after 10.00pm or before 10.00am) INTERNET amt5man@sun.leeds.ac.uk or amt5man@cms1.leeds.ac.uk

The Mark Nelson Experience is available to selected Mouth Of Sauron readers, you can't trade or subscribe to this zine on its own. This zine contains Hobby discussion.¹ It is a neofan free zine.

This is West Riding Press Publications 207

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

Influential Zines?

Which zines have been influential on the style and approach of other zines?

This was the starting premise for one of Crazy Markie's Great Hobby Ideas. Indeed this was a rare idea, one of Crazy Markie's few ideas to elicit a rave response from Nick Kinzett. Needless to say Kinzett's enthusiasm didn't actually stray so far as to deliver the promised article on those zines which had influenced Zeeby but at least it got a positive response...

The original thought came when I noted that from the ashes of **Puppet Theatre News** came **The Road Goes Ever On**, from whose ashes came **Sharp Practice**; which in turn would give us **Electric Monk**. At the time of conception **Electric Monk** had not yet started, but this is a nice progression of zines in any case.

It was this string of zines that gave me the idea of asking which zines had been influential on other zines. Of course it's hard to quantify 'influential'. The UK zine standard of editorial, letters and game-reports (themselves comprising dip, variant and Railway Rivals) seems to be so standardized as to make it unthinkable that there ever existed any other way of running a zine.

This is far from the truth, the mythical British Standard Zine is only of comparatively recent invention. In any case even standardization does not preclude influence. How is a zine laid out, how do you present your game-reports? These are the considerations that excited Kinzett.

¹Motto: If it's fit to print, tell somebody else about it.

BIG MISTAKE! THAT PLACE WAS FREEZING! AND THE PEOPLE ARE A PRETTY COLD BUNCH TOO, ESPECIALLY THE WOMEN! THAT TOWN HAS GOT TO BE THE FEMMIE-LEZBO CAPITAL OF THE UNIVERSE!



LOOK, I'M NOT GONNA TRY TO PRETEND THAT I'M THE MOST ENLIGHTENED GUY IN THE WORLD. BUT I WANT TO MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR THAT I'M ALL IN FAVOUR OF EQUAL RIGHTS FOR EVERYONE AND EAH BLAH BLA--O-EVER, I DON'T APPRECIATE BEING LECTURED OVER THE FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT THAT I PURSUE, AS IF THAT WAS THE SOURCE OF ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS! I MEAN, EVEN GUYS ARE GIVING ME SHIT THESE DAYS, THE PUSSIES! I'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE AND I AIN'T BUYING IT!



...SO NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE HAD TO GET OUT OF THAT BURG-FAST! THEY SAID CALIFORNIA IS THE PLACE YA OUGHTA BE, SO WE LOADED UP THE TRUCK AND WE MOVED TO...



When I started publishing no particular zine influenced me in my approach to publishing. At the time I put my first issue together, in the early months of 1985, I had seen fewer than twenty issues from no more than five different zines. I had decided to publish but did not take a role-model on which to base my own zine. And although the type of zine I publish has changed several times in the intervening years I have never changed as a result of seeing any one zine and wishing to mimic it.

But to return to the original question, can we discern the influence of certain zines in the make-up of current zines? The answer is yes, but only to a small extent. For instance there are similarities in the approach of **Arfle Barfle Gloop** and that of **Dib Dib Dib**. It may be possible to detect the influence of **NMR!** on **A Step Further Out** and to detect blatant plagiarism of **Dolchstoß**, **Greatest Hits** and **Thing in Y Ddraig Goch** but to talk of influence in this last case? Difficult to establish.

In an article on the American zine **Costaguanna**, in an old issue of **Greatest Hits**, Pete Birks lays the groundwork for a claim that **Costaguanna** was the most influential dip zine of all time. It doesn't use the phrase "*The first fannish diplomacy zine*", presumably because it didn't occur to him to do so, but this is what he is getting at.

But why should we be concerned about the impact of an American zine?

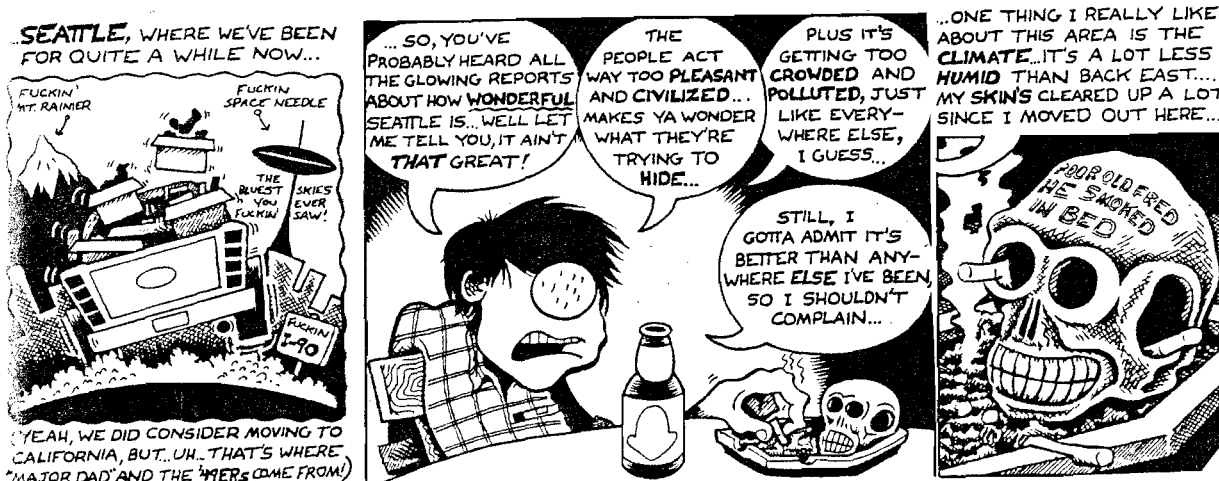
The early British diplomacy zines were warehouse affairs. The press may have been both plentiful and colourful, there may have been a mention of a new dip zine but there was little in the way of editorial presence. Dipzines were distinguished by their frequency and standard of GMing rather than by their personality. Indeed it is quite difficult to discern personality in many of the early British dip zines. Photocopy a random selection of pages from a random selection of zines and it would be difficult to say which page came from which zine.²

The first British dipzine to break this established style was John Piggott's **Ethil The Frog**. It is somewhat unfortunate that the Zine Poll only started after the high day of **Ethil** and that looking at Zine Poll results we might come to the conclusion that this was not a zine which was held in particularly high regard.

On the contrary, **Ethil The Frog** was the surprise winner of Pete Birks' All-Time-Zine-Poll which appeared in **Greatest Hits 100** (*September 1982*). And this despite two rather messy folds.

This Poll is worthy of a digression. How do you conduct an All Time Zine Poll? One approach (used by John Piggott in the November 1987 issue of **Ethil The Frog**) would be to award points to zines in each Poll, 10 pts for winning the Poll down to 1 pt for tenth place, and then to sum that zine's points over all Polls that it appeared in. In 1992 this is the only way to conduct such an activity, but it will obviously underate those zines that were being published before the first Zine Poll (in 1974). And in any case only zines which do well in the Zine Poll over a number of years will do well in this All-Time-Poll. Arguably this is only fair, but we're interested in influential zines rather than long-running zines.

²An alternative to pc would be to rip the pages out of the zines, but every serious fancritic shudders at such wanton destruction of fanzines.



In 1982 it was possible to run a real All-Time-Zine-Poll. Pete decided to limit the zines to those zines that had published over 25 issues, not unreasonable as this is more-or-less the shortest time span to run a game to completion, and to limit the voters to those hobby members who had seen a significant number of the eligible zines. Pete Birks summary of the results (6 pages at that) makes for particularly interesting reading. And the most interesting part of the Poll is that the top two zines were **Ethil** and **Dolchstoß**. Two zines which have strong claims to the worst British folds and, certainly in the case of **Dolchstoß**, not particularly frequent in an era when anything more than 4 weekly would have been considered slow.

On the surface zines which you might not expect to have much influence, or to have been held in particularly high regard.

At this distance it is difficult to imagine the impact that **Ethil The Frog** had on the Hobby, but the high presence editorials and the long-letter columns (with acidic editorial interjections) were a first and were to influence the path on which British diplomacy zines would evolve. It's difficult to guess how much influence Piggott had on Sharp, but I suspect that the influence of Conrad von Metzke on Piggott would have been small. It might have encouraged him to move in that direction but all that John did was to edit a dip zine in the style of the SF zines that he was seeing at the time. Take Conrad out of the picture and I think that **Ethil** would have had the same style, content and approach to the hobby that it had anyway. It's possible that **Costaguanna** had a bigger impact on other British editors, reinforcing the John Piggott approach to fandom.

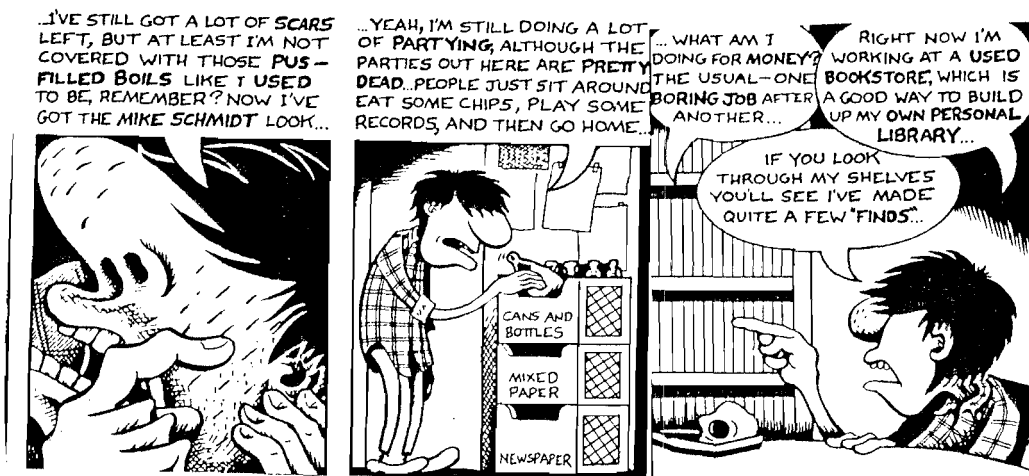
Of other British diplomacy zines I would probable rate **Greatest Hits** has a zine which has exerted considerable influence upon other British diplomacy zines, although it is hard to say just exactly what influence it has exerted.

Of course a zine can be influential in the Hobby without necessarily influencing the style of subsequent zines. At one time nearly every novice entering the Hobby passed through **Dolchstoß** and the zine attracted a loyal following, many of whom would at some stage edit a zine. Did **Dolchstoß** influence the style of these zines? As the All-Time-Zine-Poll showed it was, in any case, a zine held in high regard. Looking through back issues it is difficult to see the attraction that **Dolchstoß**Mk I held, dominated as it was by various NGC add-ons, but as ever it is easy to make the mistake of comparing to the zines of today rather than the zines of its own era.

At this point we consider Pete Sullivan's claim in *C'Est Magnifique* 111 (29/2/92) that:-

"And so Dolchstoß becomes only the second zine to win the Poll four times. Richard Sharp's record is, if anything, even more impressive than that of Greatest Hits, in that the four victories came spread over 18 years, as opposed to GH's 4-from-5 "purple patch"."

This is the *opposite* view to my own, taken from the same facts. If we remember that **Greatest Hits** won the Poll in 1979-1981 and 1983 with a second place in 1982 than I consider this achievement to be far greater than winning the Poll four times spread over 18 years. **Dolchstoß** won the Poll in 1974 (second Poll of that year), 1975, 1978 and 1992. (However, it's worth remembering that if Richard had got organized



and pulled the strings he pulled this year then he could have won the Poll in almost every year since the zine's relaunch.)

I consider it likely that other zines will win the Zine Poll two or three times over a five-year time-span, I consider it unlikely that another zine will win the Poll four times (but I can envisage it happening over a twenty year+ time span). I find it inconceivable that any zine will dominate the Poll as much as *Greatest Hits* dominated the Poll between 1979 and 1983.

The reason why no zine will dominate the Poll to this extent, and also the reason why I find it hard to imagine another zine winning the Poll four times, is that these days the difference between the top few 'cream' zines is small, and the difference between the very best and the best-of-the-rest is not so large that a good, but not particularly outstanding, zine can't win if it has an exceptional year; Nertz won the 1990 Zine Poll on the strength of having a good year rather than it being one of the top zines in the Hobby.

You'll note that in recent years a small handful of zines has dominated the top ten positions in the Zine Poll. In fact going back to, and including, the 1987 Zine Poll only 21 different zines have occupied the top 10 places. 21 different zines have occupied 50³ Poll Positions. And in the last three Polls there have only been 15 different zines occupying the top 10 places, a total of 30 Poll Positions.

What does this show? It shows that there is a small number of zines which are perceived as being top class, but that none of them dominates over the others:- since 1987 there have been five different winners! And interestingly the only time that Nertz has appeared in the Top Ten it won the Poll! More on this analysis of zines at the top next issue.

It is easy to imagine *Electric Monk* and *Arfle Barfle Gloop* dominating the top positions of the Poll in years to come, but it is hard to imagine either one of them dominating the top spot.

The Big Boys Of Regular Dip

Editors can be influential in the Hobby without their zine being influential on other zines, although I suspect that every 'influential editor' has run a well-known and widely respected zine. But I don't want to discuss hobby wide influential editors, let's make things more personal by considering those editors that I respect.

But in order to answer this question we first need to consider what we mean when we say that we respect a zine editor. Certainly I might respect John Boardman. John has been publishing since 1963 without a stop and is certainly the most consistent publisher and one of the best GMs around. But do I respect him for this accomplishment?

Not really, whilst I recognise his publishing abilities and his stability as a GM I neither respect nor disrespect him. This is because for me respect works on a more personal level. I respect an editor if I am willing to listen to what they have to say, and then willing to reconsider my own position as a result of what they have said.

³There was no poll in 1989



It's difficult to respect someone that I haven't had much contact with. I might respect Pete Birks, a long standing publisher and hobby member and an excellent writer, except that we've had very little personal contact; we've exchanged the occasional letter and exchanged a couple of words at last year's ManorCon but no more.

The question of which hobby members you respect may well be equivalent to those that have been played an important role in your fannish career, perhaps they are the first editor you had a contact with or your first GM. For me the list would include Iain Bowen, Steve Doubleday, Pete Sullivan and Richard Walkerdine in the UK and Cal White in Canada. (For anyone who hasn't anything better to do, the basis for an interesting article would be to draw-up a list of respected hobby members and who they respect and then draw up some connecting diagrams... well at *least* I think that the resulting article would be interesting!)

Some may find the inclusion of Steve Doubleday in such a list strange. Gallimaufry has rarely had widespread acclaim and despite taking an active role in setting up the Dolchstoß Stats Empire (I will *not* dignify this enterprise with the words British Statsman) Steve has a very small profile and has had so for a long time.

And when insignificant neofans⁴ gather around a diplomacy board to talk in hush tones of the Great Days of Ol'e Steve's name will be rarely mentioned. After all he didn't start publishing until circa 1977 (well into the Second Age of the Hobby) and although Steve assures me that Gallimaufry Mk I set new standards in presentation and had a marked influence on the approach that NMR! took to the hobby it's impact on the Hobby seems to have been small — probable because it didn't last very long and it's days of glory were smaller still.⁵

But Steve was there at the beginning of the founding of the Hobby.⁶ A player and variant designer in an age unimaginably old to those of us active today. And perhaps more importantly an attendee at many of those early housecons which led to the formation of the OHC and to stories of such arcane thrill power that I dare not repeat any.

Somehow Steve's role in the early hobby has been lost.⁷ This is not too surprising since short periods of intense involvement seem to have been followed by longer periods of no involvement so that most people have not been aware of Steve's involvement at a earlier stage of the Hobby. One day it would be interesting to sit down with Steve and record an indepth interview, but I have yet to transcribe my interviews with Larry Peery (1988), John Cain (1988), Randy Grigsby (1989) or Andrew England (1990)...

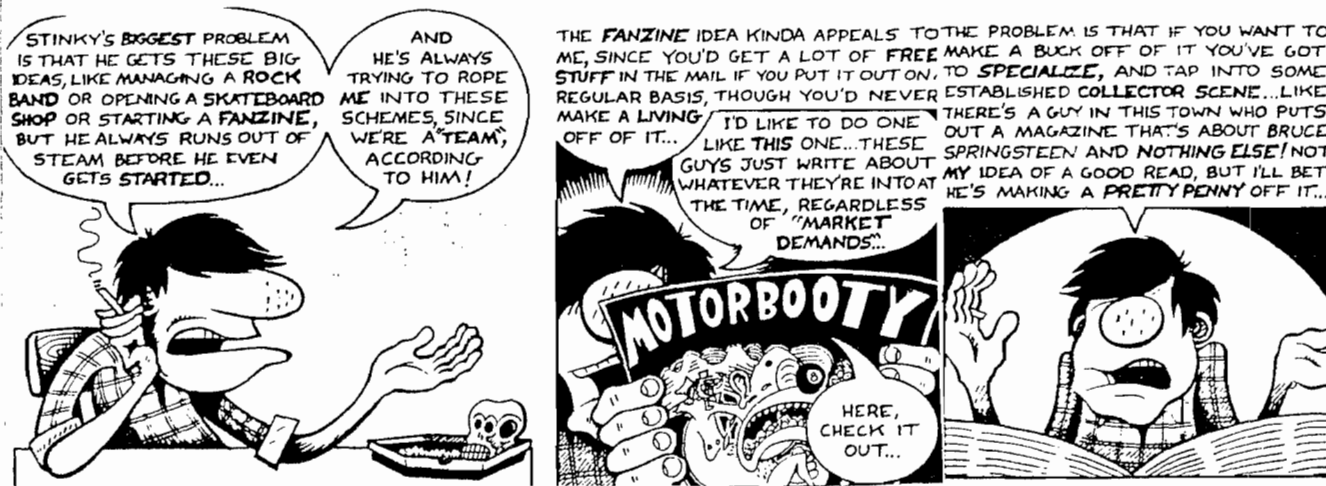
The fact that Steve has been involved in the hobby for a long time without ever really gaining hobby-wide recognition is no reason in itself to respect the man. As someone who is interested in variants I might respect him for all the hard work that he has put into this part of the hobby over the years. Not only as a variant designer, a writer of the occasional article on variants, as a variant GM and player and as a

⁴ Aren't they just?

⁵ 10th out of 30 zines in the 1979 Zine Poll

⁶ I draw a distinction between the beginning of the Postal Diplomacy hobby and the beginning of the Hobby, just as I draw a distinction between The Hobby and the postal hobby.

⁷ Then again if you've ever read any of those early dip variants then...



Custodian of the UKVB on numerous occasions spread over two decades. All worthy 'achievements'.

To be honest, *The Mark Nelson Experience* is a rather elitist zine. Not in the sense that I only want certain people to read it, but because in order to really understand and 'enjoy' it you need not only to be an active fan but also to have a wide understanding of the Hobby and how it works. This is not a zine for Joe Springboarder with his new passion in the really wonderful concept of postal diplomacy.

And it's all too easy for the readers of *The Mark Nelson Experience* to forget that at some long forgotten moment they too were innocent novices exploring a brave new world, instead of the cynical has-beens that they are today. From personal experience, and from being a *Gallimaufry* reader of long-standing, I can say that Steve is one of the few editors that genuinely enjoys novices getting his zine and asking questions. Tell Steve that you've only just entered the hobby and off will go a long letter telling you what's what and carefully explaining how postal Diplomacy works. Express an interest in variants and another letter will be sent telling you how to avoid common mistakes and offering to look over your new design. No matter that Steve has seen it all before, a newcomer to the Hobby asking him a question seems to galvanise him into action.

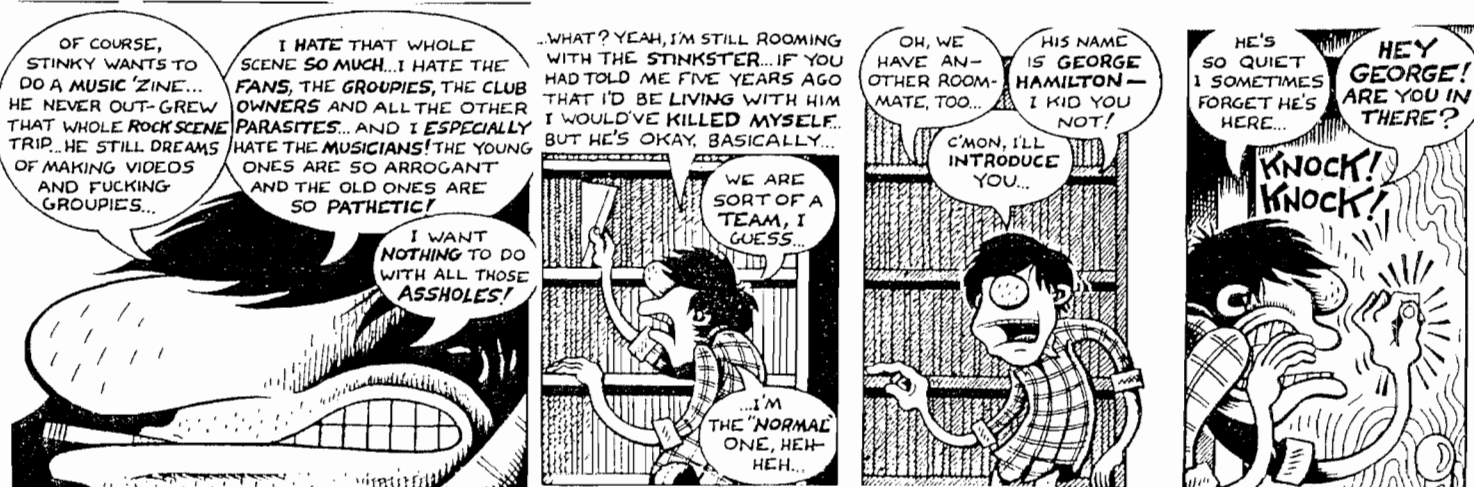
I don't suppose that the majority of editors actually dislike novices, but send them 'I am a novice' letter and the odds are that you'll see it published with one or two editorial comments tacked on the end. More often than not these are not letters which should be printed. Who wants the world to know that they are a novice, that you are not certain of how to adjudicate a particular set of orders or even how convoy orders work? Most editors would probably defend their actions by saying that they didn't have time to write personal letters to any old novice who writes them.

No, I respect Steve because of the care and attention he accords to novices, almost as if you were doing him a favour by asking him your question! And he also happens to be one of the few people I accept as my equal in the world of variants and accordingly I always listen to his views on that area of the hobby.

But enough of this sickening toadying. You might think that this was a blatant attempt at getting on Steve's good side, after all the nasty things I have to say recently on the topic of the Doubleday-Sharp state-empire. Comments that provoked Steve to a rare moment of anger in *Gallimaufry* 117 (February 1992) (the only time I can recall him being angry in print) and resulted in a request to visit Mr Doubleday at his retreat in Haworth at my convenience to explain my position.

As is only right under the circumstances I travelled to Mr Doubleday's abode to explain my position. Matters of some import were discussed in a secluded part of the Haworth Old Hall. Many faults were found in the Dolchstoßrating system and an explanation of the structure of the stats database was given. The tale of the first meeting of Pete Birks and Steve Doubleday was told. The value and use of Green Points was discussed. There was much discussion of the good ol'e days.

Naturally one of the things which we discussed was Steve's idea of a Hobby Bond (not to be confused with Harry Bond) and the current novice set-up. Steve reminded me that the CGS of the 1980's (which a number of people would like to see resurrected to replace *Springboard*) was itself nothing more than a hangover from the NGC approach to Novice distribution. When Steve entered the hobby you joined an



NGC waiting list and when that waiting list filled the gamestart was given to a NGC zine by Richard Sharp. At one time it was rare for NGC zines to have their own waiting lists, all waiting lists were run by the NGC! Even at a latter stage when zines had their own waiting lists there was still a NGC waiting list.

So, the CGS has a much longer past than some had previously thought. But more telling was Steve's comment that if **Springboard** had been the point of entrance into the hobby when he was a novice then he would have dropped out within months and never have given any further thought to postal diplomacy.

And Steve isn't the only person to have made this comment. Iain Bowen has also said that if he had entered the Hobby through **Springboard** then he would have quickly dropped out. And if we're naming names then I also feel the same, if **Springboard** had been my first point of call it would have also have been my last.

Well, there are probably only one or two individuals who would not mourn a Mark-Nelson-Free-Hobby, but a hobby without Iain Bowen (not longer an enfant terrible) and/or Steve Doubleday? It makes you think what calibre of fen have already been put off the Hobby by **Springboard**.

But instead of going into this let us instead go back to the events of the week before...

SHOCKING SULLIVAN IN YORKMEET SPANKING SESSION!

Sad but true, but we can **EXCLUSIVELY** reveal that Mr Sullivan is not the gentle giant that he would have us believe. The spanking in question occurred at the March Yorkmeet. No sooner had Mr I.D Bowen and Mr P Sullivan arrived then bottoms were being bared and spanking started.

To be exact, Mr Nelson was being spanked by Mr Bowen whilst Mr Sullivan watched. The cause of this spanking were certain comments alleged to have been made by Mr Bowen and printed by Mr Nelson in the February issue of his fanzine **The Mouth of Sauron**. It has since been brought to Mr Nelson's attention that there is a gentlemen's agreement at the Yorkmeet that any comments made there are strictly 'Off-The-Record' and may not be reprinted unless authorization for an official leak is obtained.

Mr Bowen did not accept Mr Nelson's claim that he was unaware of any such agreement and spanked him some more for daring to suggest that it had never been informed of this agreement.

Mr Sullivan then bought Mr Nelson a drink.

At the time of going to press we are uncertain if the disclosure of this spanking session is in itself a breach of the Yorkmeet Accords but Mr Nelson is said to preparing himself for another round of spanking.



The Letter

ANDY KEY (A_KEY@UK.AC.BRISTOL-POLY.CMSVAX, 1-4-92) "Quick thoughts and comments on *The Mark Nelson Experience* :Let's face it, you and I have a different outlook on life. If I make a comment (like "Is this the Springboard effect?", for instance) it's because it's occurred to me and I just thought I'd mention it in case anyone else can expand it or refute it."

"I'm not into winding people up by deliberately attacking them, because I don't think it leads to reasoned discussion. If my statements come across as only mildly controversial instead of downright antagonistic, that's the way they're supposed to be. I realize you make sometimes outrageous statements to wind people and get a violent reaction, but I don't. (Well, okay, not much.) Possibly if you were a modicum more tactful and less-over-the-top, the folks in the hobby would take your views seriously. But, chacun a son gout, as they in Southampton."

I recall reading recently that due to adverse criticism of the *Arfle Barfle Gloop* trading policy⁸ Kris Morris had contemplated folding the zine! The only reason he didn't was because of the fact that the zine came 5th in the Zine Poll!!

I ask you, what's more pathetic, somebody thinking of folding because they're not playing the game according to the 1971 rulebook or somebody continuing to run a zine because of the prestige in coming 5th in the Zine Poll?!

Well, it makes you want to read *Thing on the Mat* doesn't it? And so I did. It's certainly true that we have different approaches to Fandom, probably because we entered Fandom at different times and have evolved along different Fannish paths. I wonder how you (and Kris Morris come to that) would have fared in the Good Old Days. These were the days when the fanzines were Good and only real-men edited fanzines⁹.

I shudder to think what the effect of a prime Pete Doubleday review would have been on you!

As for your comment on *Springboard*, obviously you are right; there is a *Springboard* effect at play. This is one of the reasons why a growing number of editors have been making comments about *Springboard*, you may have noticed a few of them in the *Hobby Press*.

NEXT ISSUE...NEXT ISSUE...

Issue Three will be produced for the second Sunday in May (which just happens to be a Yorkneet).

"Yorkshire people have a long-standing reputation for dourness, pig-headedness, and arrogance. Is this true of all Yorkshire folk?" *Andy Key Electric Monk 19 (June 1990)*

⁸They don't believe in playing the fannish game
⁹err, not that I am trying to imply anything...

