

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (May 1992)

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

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The Mark Nelson Experience is available to everyone on the mailing list (circulation this issue is 25). This zine contains Hobby discussion.¹ It is a neofan free zine.

This is West Riding Press Publications 205

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

Late Comment On Issue One

Andrew Moss reminds me that he is in FT Education, pushing the number of editors in FT Education up from two to three (actually I've since thought of another one so the total goes upto four). He also points out that whilst Issue One contained plenty of material about fannishness, I never actually defined the term. Funny that. I have told Andrew that he can buy me a drink (or two) at ManorCon if he wants to learn about the fannish way of life.

Come to think of it, another pint will get him a lecture on the role of fannishness in the diplomacy hobby.²

Comments on Issue Two

Not too surprisingly Iain Bowen did not entirely agree with my assessment that **Y Ddraig Goch** had been influenced by the trio of **Dolchstoß**, **Greatest Hits** and **Thing on the Mat**. He did concede that **Thing** had had considerable influence on his approach to fandom, but claimed that a "Sweepies Section" is common throughout the Hobby and that his early zines were mightily influenced by **Denver Glont**.³

¹Actually it contains Crazie Markie writing about his view of the Hobby rather than various people actually *discussing* the Hobby.

²As well as the publication rights

³It must be pointed out to younger readers, and it appears Pete Sullivan (who claims to have 'forgotten'), that Iain has edited two entirely different diplomacy zines, but rather cunningly kept the same numbering system.

I only have a few issue of **Denver** in my Zine Collection and Iain knows better than I who has influenced him, but a new zine is very rarely a finished product and it will usually change as it ages and matures. An editor may start under one set of influences and finish under another set and sometimes it is very difficult to establish when this change occurred. Furthermore, that **Greatest Hits** *may* have influenced the whole hobby does not preclude it from influencing **Y Ddraig Goch**.

The influence of **Dolchstoß** is more difficult to establish. There are the covers, and the existence of the anonymous columnist but there are also more subtle things such as the way in which the letter column is sometimes constructed. And there is nothing wrong in borrowing approaches to fanzine production, as Iain agreed when I pointed this out.

Pete 'Blue Eyes' Sullivan claimed that the production of **The Mark Nelson Experience** showed clearly that I had been heavily influenced by none other than Iain Bowen because, and how's this for intellectual rigour, I was putting all the bitchy comments into the footnotes. Well, I'm at a lost for footnotes.

Finally James Nelson wanted to know how many status points I gained from my quick toady and carousal with Steve Doubleday. If I get time I might just rewrite the En Garde! rules into a parody of fandom, it's all there isn't it? Toadying at different hobby-meets (clubs, naturally the Yorkmeet becomes Bothwells), regiments become different sections of fandom, duelling becomes feuding, the campaign season becomes the convention season...

Harry 'Hobby Bond' Bond in Bland Bond Bond Bimbo Bombshell!

I first met Harry Bond at LuCon, a SF Con held at Leeds University in February 1988. This was organised by Steve Glover for the benefit of his skiffy sf buffs, who duely crawled out to the con.

Throughout my days as an undergraduate my mentor in the University SF soc was Shaun Wilcox, a great guy with plenty of ideas when it came to conniving and scheming⁴. On the Friday night of the con we were to be found, as all true fen are to be in such circumstances, sitting in the bar. And with each new arrival Sean would give me a quick run-down on their fanac.

At this time Shaun was seeing a few more SF zines than I was, I was seeing none and Shaun was seeing a couple as a 'reward' from his days as **Black Hole** editor. Anyway, Harry Bond walks in and no sooner is Shaun giving me the run down on Harry's Eastside fanac when Harry looks in our direction and walks over! So I get to greet Mr Bond and proffer one or two inconsequential words which he duely takes as his fannish due before walking away.

Years later, the next time I see Harry, he would deny this conversation. But I was there. Harry spoke to a neo-fan **SHOCK! HORROR!!**

⁴not that we ever got around to implementing any of our great ideas, such as The Steve Glover Game...

At this time Harry had a growing reputation in SF fandom. At the tender age of 17 he had already produced a couple of issues of his zine **Nowhere Fast**⁵ which had not met with a critical reception, or rather they had met with a critical reception. He had then allied himself with a certain section of fannish fandom and was slowly making his way up the Fannish Social Status Table by a policy of conspicuous toadying. He was also putting his spare time to good use by devouring Vinc Clarke's immense collection of SF zines.

Several years later Harry Bond would meet Iain Bowen at a convention (possible a BiCon?), and would get dragged into dipdom via **Y Ddraig Goch**. Not the first SF fan to be seen in **Y Ddraig Goch** for Joy Hibbit had also made an appearance in those august pages, and she too attended LuCon — the first and last time she attended a Glover convention.⁶

After meeting Iain it wasn't long before Harry spread, like some damn computer virus, all over the Hobby. Undertaking the tried and tasted method of becoming well-known in fandom by undertaking an extensive letter-writer campaign, the Harry virus quickly spread. Exploiting a bug in the RECEIVE MAIL routine Harry was soon to be found frequenting all manner of dip zines, from grotty little zine to, at the upper end of the market, some of the more plush ones.

It became clear that it was only a matter of time before Harry launched his own dipzine.

In the intervening years between his appearance at LuCon and his entrance into the Hobby he had made headway in SFdom. He had began to attract a reputation as a zine reviewer and was making his way towards securing the position of organiser of the Nova Awards. Those of us who were aware of Harry's sf fanac and his growing interest in dipdom wondered if his interest in SFdom was waning.

One thing which we were sure about was that a Harry Bond zine was something to look forward to. Harry had been exposed at birth to the traditions of SF fandom. He would fill his new zine with good articles, with plenty of references to other zines and editors. His zine reviews would be amongst the best in the hobby, he would be apply the expertise he had gained reviewing SF zine to good effect.⁷ Moreover his new zine wouldn't be a random collection of editorial, letters, article and games put together at the last moment to satisfy some minimum page count routine. No they'd be thought put into this zine, which would be planned as a collective whole worth far more than the sum of its individual parts.

High expectations for the new boy wonder of fandom, could he deliver the goods?

In retrospect it appears that we were expecting too much from Harry. We were expecting him to bring over skills he had developed and honed in SF fandom and apply them to producing a diplomacy zine. But from Harry's point of view why not simple produce a fanzine according to the traditions and expectations of the diplomacy hobby? And why not.⁸

⁵aptly named

⁶I am sure that Joy will be delighted to learn that Sean did not consider her a skiffy buff, unfortunately I can't remember what he *did* say...

⁷In fact, because of his reknown as a zine reviewer he was the prime candidate to take over MFG.

⁸It is interesting to compare the approach taken by John Piggott in the 1970's and Harry in the 1990's

The U-BEND Story: The Early Issues

U-Bend had the fortune, or perhaps misfortunate, to appear at just the right time to be heralded as the 'first new dip zine in two years'. Praise was heaped upon Harry because he was the first to break this drought in new zines. Combine this with the attention that his extensive letter-writing campaign had bought him and you had a fanzine which rapidly gained a large number of subscribers and quickly started a large number of games — by issue 5 Harry was discouraging newcomers from subbing to the zine.

This is not a situation conducive to the production of good fan-writing. Harry was swamped by a flood of gamestarts, there was no room in the zine to develop an editorial presence (perhaps, more accurately, no time to develop such a presence) and little time to write articles. Those early issues may have contained plenty of games, but they had pretty little that indicated that Harry was a fan writer of note.

Indeed there was talk at this time at the Yorkmeet⁹ that Harry might not have the stamina to produce such a game-heavy zine. At the first Yorkmeet after ManorCon 1992 there was a serious discussion of the new dip zines and a feeling emerged that **A Little Original Sin** was the zine that U-Bend "should have been".

Of course this was nonsense. With all due respect to Vic Hall, he has shown no interest in fan-writing. He's one of the better writers in Fandom, but not a fan-writer. What the above statement really means was that **Sin** was interesting and showing potential whilst U-bend was neither interesting nor showing potential.

There was also a feeling that Harry Bond was not paying his dues. One reason for this believe was an examination of the review column in U-Bend 4 (*July 1991*) in which Harry reviewed six of the new zines.

As I commented in **The Mouth Of Sauron Volume VII (V)** (*September 1991*)

"Given Harry's experience as a SF reviewer I was disappointed by the standard of his reviews. He seems to suggest that the worth of a new zine depends more on the relationship between the new editor and the reviewer than on the potential of the zine. Additionally, remakes such as "*we could have a future Hobby Focus here*" after one issue of a new zine do not inspire confidence that young Harry knows what he is talking about."

"In particular young Harry sticks the knife into Andrew Mosses' **Age of Reason**... Harry soon finds real faults with the proposed zine, "*It's more the red and green illioes... 75 pence an issue is actually quite expensive as zines go, actually, Andrew and A4 centre stapled is nothing new either.*"

As zines go 75pence an issue may be the upper end of the price spectrum but there are several other zines that have similar prices. The last time I looked **Arfle Barfle Gloop** was 50p + postage, **Dolchstoß** was 75pence an issue.

⁹the premiere hobbyneet in the country

This comment prompted an exchange of comments in **U-Bend** and **The Mouth of Sauron** as to the relative worth of each other's zine-reviews. In a letter sated 21/2/92 Harry writes:

“And they were indeed reviews, not criticism. Criticism is an in-depth form of reviewing, on a higher plan altogether, and I rarely have the time to do that nowadays. Maybe I ought to try some time. Reviews are a lot easier, as you don't have to draw all the threads neatly into a conclusion about the State of the Art at the end of them, you can just do them in a string. My reviews would indeed be pretty dire as criticism, I think they were pretty reasonable, all things considered. User-guide reviews were what they were meant to be. If I ever do a critical article, I shall clearly label it as such.”

And you know what? Harry is right! Viewed from the perspective of the standard zine review written by the standard editor Harry's 'reviews' are no worse than those that appear in fanzines up and down the land — if anything there are probably better than most. But the question shouldn't be 'Are Harry's reviews better than worse than the average review' but 'Are they the best that Harry can right?'

In the final analysis fan criticism should not be about destroying the target of your criticism and it should not just be used as a forum for showing off your fannish erudition¹⁰; the aim should be to point the way forward for a better product¹¹.

We know that Harry can write good fanzine reviews, that he is a good fan writer and that he has a good knowledge of 'Fanzine Theory and Practice'. Perhaps we are being selfish, but we want Harry to produce the best zine that he is capable of and do not wish to see him producing a mere shadow of the fanzine that he might produce. The shadow may be a better zine than most in the hobby, and it might be popular with the plebian mass of the Hobby, but it remains only a shadow of the fanzine that we might see and there is an immense difference between 'popular' and good.

U-Bend: The Road to Recovery

The last few issues of **U-Bend** have seen a significant improvement as Harry finds more time to write the zine, and he has managed to produce some entertaining writing. The recovery started with Issue 8 (February 1992).

Sporting a cover of Judge Lurcio, the editorial describes how Lurcio's mistress Ammonia discovers diplomacy and soon sets to playing the game with great gusto; filling the Imperial Highways with messengers carrying dispatches to the corners of the Empire.

Harry continues this Up Pompeii theme throughout the chat side of the zine, throughout the Hobby news Section and into the letter column, livening up the zine.

¹⁰Nelsonite in-joke

¹¹This doesn't apply if the target is an Enemy of the Hobby

As well as this continuing theme, Harry introduces the idea of Hobby Clerihews; which have proven to be a nice little earner for the letter column — although most of them are pretty dire. What's a Clerihew? ('Sire Humphrey Davy/ Abominated gravy/ He lived in the odium/ Of having discovered Sodium). The only one of Harry's I cared for was:

Duncan Proffitt?
Oh, come off it!
The title of his zine
Is the most appropriate ever seen.

A long running campaign of Harry's has been to try and restart the Rusty Bolts, naturally with him as Custodian. He has even gone so far as to summarise various conversations which we are led to believe he has had with Nick Kinzett, even going so far as to claim that Nick actually wanted to continue running the Rusties.

Harry's campaign to restart the Rusty Bolts has now run out of steam and he seems to have moved his attention elsewhere. This is for the best as the Rusty Bolts have had their day and are best consigned to Hobby history. They may have been suitable for the, more cohesive, hobby of the 1980's, but not for the brave new Hobby that is emerging in the 1990's; a Hobby that scorns wide-spread trading, Hobby tradition and even the concept of a Unified Hobby¹².

Harry hasn't been deterred by the lack of interest in reviving the Rusty Bolts, for in issue eight he instigated them under another name — The Gladrags Awards.

Here we have a set of awards for such matters of achievement as "Worst Zine", "Worst Zine for Hobby News", "Worst Looking Zine", "Worst Postal Games GM" and the such like. Here we have a new Poll with the deadline for votes being the next issue.

So let's take a look at **U-Bend 9** (*March 1992*).

It's a mixture of pc and mimeo with an amusing Judge Dredd based cover based around a notice from the Justice Department. But what of the content?

One of the things discussed back in issue one of **The Mark Nelson Experience** was the track record of student editors. In an article¹³ on the professions of zine editors Harry notes that editors seems to cluster into either being 'computer people' (Iain Bowen, Steve Doubleday and Duncan Proffitt amongst current editors¹⁴) or 'accountant' (Geoff Challenger¹⁵, Vic Hall, Steve Howe and Pete Sullivan).

¹²If only William would stop wittering about Grand Unified Field Theory and start writing about Grand Unified Hobby Theory

¹³or was it a hastily conceived space filler?

¹⁴although according to rumour Dunx is no longer current

¹⁵defunct

I don't think that we want to go into this in too much detail, I would hardly call a grouping of 3-4 editors a significant number. What does Harry have to say about student editors? Well he is hard-pressed to find them, according to my reckoning there are Andrew Moss¹⁶, James Nelson, Mark Nelson and William Whyte¹⁷.

It seems to me that Harry falls into the normal pattern of bashing student editors because they are students. For instance he points a big stick at Steve Norledge (**Rapscallion**), Ian Shaw (**20 years On**) and school-children editors Nigel McCabe (**Stick The Knife In**¹⁸) and Mike Sherrad (**Our 'Entry**).

There are two things amiss with this approach. Firstly **Rapscallion** produced 15 or 16 issues before folding, which is about average so I'm not sure how this can be quoted as a 'a typical crap student zine', and secondly it seems to me that the reason why most lists of student editors only contain messy folds is that their compilers forget to mention all those zines started by students which didn't fold messily! That's right, any successful zine produced by an editor who starts pubbing as a student but progresses to a job without folding no longer counts as a 'student' zine.

Asides from the four editors already mentioned editors who started their zine publishing careers as students include Derek Caws (**War & Peace**), Pete Sullivan (**C'Est Mag**), Iain Bowen (**Y Ddraig Goch**) and Simon Billenness (**20 YO, Inflammatory Material**) — all of whom edited for at least some period as a student and all of whom played significant roles in the Hobby in the 1980's.

It's surprising how these success stories have been forgotten by the distractors of student editors. But of course, if they started to include the success stories then their definitive lists showing how badly student editors perform wouldn't look quite so impressive. I'm not saying that there haven't been bad student editors, just that student editors -as a collective- get an undeserved rocky time.

Here's an amusing extract from **U-Bend**, slightly spoiled by Harry apologising at the end in case anyone should think he was being serious (I didn't include the apology) — are we to think that his readers (most of them from in the **Arfle Barfle Gloop** end of the hobby) are so dim as not to be able to recognise carefree banter?

“... I prefer dissatisfied customers so I can be thoroughly rude to them. Pete Sullivan, in the current **CMag**, seems to think that the sharp edge to my tongue is not befitting in such a happy, peaceful hobby as this (an odd statement to make, since in the same article he praises Mark Nelson for his bitchiness¹⁹). Well, shall I tell you something, Sullivan? Not all of us are squeak clean like you, and not all of us live in the fool's paradise that everything in the garden is lovely. For proof of this you should refer to the aforementioned Mr Nelson and his ((good)) friend Mr Bowen, and they will I am sure) quite happily furnish you with evidence that in this hobby, as in the real world, people get annoyed (especially people like me, because I just lurve

¹⁶No doubt Harry is waiting until a time when he quote this as a 'typical student editor'

¹⁷The youngest editor ever to win the Zine Poll

¹⁸How the Hobby did so when this folded...

¹⁹shurly shome mistake?

sharpening my rapier wit on dullards not in my clique) and people lose their temper (especially me, as I am a foul-mouthed fire-spittin feudin' fightin' flatin' fucker)."

"So don't mess with me, Sullivan, or you might lose a few of your blonde-boy good looks, *capische?* Get back to your kindergarten with the North Yorks mafia and keep practising your bridge till you can outplay the rest of the hobby. Till then don't mess with the big boys or you'll end up in concrete."

Pretty good, eh?

You know a number of people have written to me about the NYGB and the various Hobby pronouncements that seem to descend from this august body at regular intervals²⁰. But can anyone seriously doubt the credentials of NYGB members to past judgement on zines, their editors and the Hobby? Can there be any doubt that we are talking about people steeped in the ways and tradition of the Hobby? People that have paid their fannish dues, I think not. No doubt this will upset a few little upstarts in a few obscure parts of the Hobby, but such is life.

Secondly, a sound knowledge of trump-squeezes is essential to make your way in the Hobby today; can we be sure that Mr Bond knows how to play them? I think we should be told. Every member of the NYGB is tasted for a basic aptitude to the Great Game of Bridge. Does young Harry fear that he will not pass the test and fade into obscurity?

The most amusing response I've seen to this little gem was John Marsden's response in a recent issue of *Ode*. I don't have that issue to hand but his comment was something along the lines of "*this is nasty and horrible Harry, please don't shout or I'll burst into tears.*" A strange response considering that there are few people in the Hobby who've feuded more often than John Marsden.

Of course, we musn't get sidetracked away from the results of that well known Hobby Poll "The Gladrags". In case you have forgotten this Poll had a deadline of one month from its announcement — giving other editors more than sufficient time to plug it in their own zine. A careful examination of *U-Bend 9* reveals that not only does Harry not tell us who voted but he doesn't tell us how many people voted.

What do we make of a 'Hobby Poll' where the names of voters and the number of voters is not revealed? Let me tell you the name of the voter -Harry Bond- and the total number of votes used to determine the results -1. There is nothing wrong with such a 'Hobby Poll', and Harry's comments make interesting reading in view of the probable fact that he decided, at whim, which zine would win which award — one advantage of running this kind of Poll is that you can ensure that your enemies win something.

²⁰once a month in fact folks

1. Worst Zine: **Garbage In, Garbage Out** "*Vapidity is not the word.*"
2. Worst Zine for Dippy/Variants **Up Around the Bend**
3. Worst Zine for Other Games: **Smodnoc**
4. Worst Zine for Hobby News: **Dolchstoss** "*for whilst maligners' claims that Sharp still thinks the hobby is in 1977 may not be quite true, you must look hard in the zine for any mention of the broader hobby.*"
5. Worst Lettercolumn: **Springboard** "*they've been near top in some of the other categories*"
6. Worst New Zine of 1991: After disqualifying **GIGO** on the grounds that Harry was still friends with Dunx the award goes, surprise, surprise, to **Age Of Reason** Shame on Mr Bond, especially as it goes on to mention 'overpricing'.
7. Worst Looking Zine: "*Again, a couple of promising candidates have better categories elsewhere (look down one. Mr Howe), so the otherwise unexceptionable to middling Ode gets it here.*"
8. Least Improved Zine: **ASFO**
9. Least Regretted Fold: "*and have no hesitation in sending this award to Andy Bate for Froggy*"
10. Worst Postal Games GM: Harry Bond
11. Least Feared Opponent: Nick Drage
12. Worst Letter writer: John Colledge.

But, of greater import for the future of the zine is the inclusion in the zine's envelope of a flyer for the national Bisexual Conference

We turn our attention to **Up Around The Bend** 10 (*April 1992*)

Harry has, at last, made the transition to 'real zine' status with a fully mimeod zine²¹. I don't know why, but there seems to be something intrinsically *fannish* about mimeod covers; a cover that the editor has fought to put onto the stencil using the most basic of instruments.

There have been good pc covers, but somehow a pc cover just doesn't look as good as the same cover in mimeo. And Harry has an amusing 'special too late for the ides of March cover'. Would it have worked as well on a pc zine? No. Maybe it's because, as a reader, we expect a higher quality cover on a pc zine; a piece of 'art'.

One aspect of 'Fanzine Theory and Practice' which is easy to utilise when producing a mimeod zine is the use of colour paper for certain sections. Indeed there is a psychological relationship between the colour of

²¹It goes without saying that we couldn't take him seriously as an editor until he started using the pc method of mimeo.

the paper used to duplicate the pages and how the reader response to the content of the zine. The mimeod issues of **Y Ddraig Goch** were on the cheapest and most nasty white paper that Iain could find. His continued use of this horrible paper ensured that, in the Nelson household, **Y Ddraig Goch** was referred to as 'Bogroll Paper' because that is what it appeared that the zine was printed on. Of course once a year Iain would use a plusher style of paper, as I recall this time often coincided with the month before the deadline for Zine Poll ballot papers...

Mad Policy was renowned for its use of Gold paper, as befits a first class zine. Still, I've always approved of the use of different coloured paper for different sections of the zine. One colour for the editorial, another for any articles that you print, another for the letter column and the last colour for the game adjudications. As well as making it easy to identify different sections of the zine this approach adds greatly to the zine.

Sadly Harry doesn't quite reach this ideal of mimeod zine production. Although he managed to go through a range of differently coloured paper, orange (for editorial/cover/zine reviews), green/yellow/white for the adjudications/game reports and finishing comments in a light brown (?) colour, he hasn't quite got the co-ordination right and accordingly loses a point or so for sloppy workmanship. Still a good try.

Of critical importance to any new zine is setting up your first fan feud, you just can't be taken seriously as an editor until you've chosen a target and destroyed them. Here's Harry's first attempt, in response to Dunx Proffitt's response to the flyer distributed in the previous issue.

"Dunky apparently considered that his right to chuck the flyer in the bin was not sufficient and penned a quite nasty, crabbed little attack on me in GIGO! ... Now I have no objection to people just throwing the flyer away, as I expect most of you did, because I thought that was what would happen; but people who try and tell me what to do in my own zine make me mad, and when I get mad I'm not a pretty sight. Grrrr."

"So do put your brain back in gear, Dunky. To be an enemy of the Hobby is one thing and not a really serious one. But to be an enemy of free speech is something else again."²²

"...he's threatening to cut trades with me because I 'impose my sexuality' on him. Grow up, Dunky."

As well as running the Zine Poll results Harry produces the tradition review of 'all the zines you see in the Poll', something which has gone out of favour in recent years as the followers of wide-spread trading has decreased in number. The following is interesting,

*"It has already been commented by various dissatisfied parties that **Y Ddraig Goch's** high placing²³ is undeserved and that Iain Bowen has benefited unduly from holding the post of Zine Poll organiser."*

²²An excusable comment in a neo-editor such as Harry, surely there can be no bigger condemnation of your role in the Hobby than being categorised an 'Enemy of the Hobby' by the bastions of the Yorkmeet?

²³Second in the Poll.

Interesting? Yes, I think so. Some time ago I did some work to examine the benefit that the Zine Poll Custodian's zine gained from its editor running the Poll, there is no doubt that it gains something; the question is what?

Examination of this for the specific case of **Y Ddraig Goch** isn't possible because Iain hasn't printed full details of the 1991 and 1992 Poll results. But a trend that I noticed in earlier Polls is that the average vote for the Custodian's zine steadily moves upwards - no-one is willing to tell the organiser that they think their zine is crap! Also the Custodian can maximise his vote, since people that write normally write to him can be expected to include a completed Ballot paper in with their orders/letters.

However, Iain had neither plugged the zine in **Y Ddraig Goch** nor distributed zine poll ballots through his zine. This is probable just as well because had he done so he would undoubtedly have won at least one of the last two polls. And I did not consider **Y Ddraig Goch** to be a Poll-winning zine in either of the last two Polls.

So, **Y Ddraig Goch** has gained some benefit from Iain running the Poll, though not as much as we might have at first expected. 1991 was not a particularly good year for the zine, Iain spent most of his time dithering between continuing the zine at full speed and running down to a fold and not surprisingly this dithering was reflected in the zine; it's only been in the last few months that he seems to have decided that he will continue pubbing and accordingly the last few months has seen a number of goodies appearing in **Y Ddraig Goch**.

It's fair to say that Iain didn't deserve to win the Poll this year, and possible fair to say that he didn't deserve to come second.

On the other hand, which zine deserved to finish second? Not, I suggest, **Electronic Monk** that master of blandness and of presentation over content. Not **Small Furry Creature Press** which may well be an excellent magazine to play in, but is no longer a fanzine. Not **A Step Further Out**, a good zine but never good enough to be classed as a Zine Poll winning candidate.

No, it seems to me that this year there was no obvious second-place zine. It may be true that **Y Ddraig Goch** only came second on the back of Iain running the Poll but it seems to me that, with the exception of **Greatest Hits** which has had an excellent year, there was no obvious second-place zine. That so many people consider **Electric Monk** to be such an outstanding zine summarises just exactly what is wrong with British diplomacy Hobby of the 1990's - presentation valued over content.

Passing over the letter column, which is yet really to find its feet (although currently enlivened by the Hibbit-Walkerdine feud on one "Freddy Mercury" who I am led to believe was a 'rock musician' of some popular appeal, if you can credit it) we reach Harry's article on 'Technology and Zine Production'.

An article so good that in fact this is the second time that it has been published, Harry has merely changed the names of SF pubbers and SF zines to Hobby pubbers and diplomacy zines. I don't want to comment in depth on this article, I intend to reprint it in a future issue of **The Mark Nelson Experience** but Harry misses out an important connection between the increasing use of computer technology to produce

the zine and the decline in wide-spread trading and the concept of a unified Hobby.

Every few years from the late 1970's and into the mid 1980's a zine editor would announce that he was cutting trades. Not because he didn't think that wide-spread trading was a good idea but because of expense. Pc²⁴ or offset zines are more expensive to produce than mimeo zines and because of this increase in costs editors could no longer afford to trade widely across the hobby. And each editor to announce the cutting of all his trades would be roundly condemned by, an ever decreasing section of, the hobby.

And the boom in zines in the mid 1980's, when the number of zines in mainstream circulation doubled, almost killed off the idea of wide-spread trading for the sake of wide-spread trading.

But what finally killed off the idea of wide-spread trading was the emergence of a group of editors in the late 1980's, many of which had been involved in the pbm hobby, who saw no point trading with more zines than they would have subbed to had they not been pubbing. And these were all editors who produced pc zines and were more concerned with the money in their pocket rather than with the concept of a Unified Hobby. Just exactly why they should be so concerned about money is puzzling, since they are all in full time employment and can stand to make a small loss on their zine but it seems that they no longer view the diplomacy hobby as a hobby, only as a market place for players and games.

At one time editors would trade as a matter of other course with any other editor that offered a trade. First editors started cutting those trades which were of zines that 'were so crap that I wouldn't dream of subscribing to it'. Then editors started cutting trades with those zines that were good, but were zines that weren't sufficiently interesting. Then editors cut all those trades for zines that wouldn't sub to if they weren't pubbing. And all the time these cuts have been for reasons of expenditure. Then there were no zines left to trade with.

The Letter Column

David Hood (2905 20th Street NE, Hickory, NC 28601 USA) (April 1992) "OK, so exactly what is 'fannishness' then? You say it's not lettercol, and you say it's not chat. Obviously it has nothing to do with games, and does not include articles on politics. Is it hobby news — no, that's 'chat'! Is it personal life stuff — wait, isn't that chat also?"

"The only thing left is those parts of a zine in which it is determined whether something is fannish or not. Debates are whether this person or that zine is fannish. Who are you trying to kid? Fannish just feeds on itself, doesn't it? What you really want to be able to do is look down your nose and ((??) everyone else as being less-than-fannish. Seems silly to me."

"Games are obviously not the only thing. But without them, we would just be pen-pals, not hobbyists."

I'll probably devote an issue of **The Mark Nelson Experience** to this after ManorCon. Suffice to say that the most important aspect of *fannishness* is the attitude of fannish fans to the concept of a Hobby.

²⁴not to be confused with pc zines