

# THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (August 1992)

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

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*The Mark Nelson Experience* is available for the "usual" (circulation this issue is 35). This zine contains Hobby discussion<sup>1</sup> and will fold with the September 1993 issue.

This is West Riding Press Publications 215

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

## A Classic Example of "Blatant Toadism"

In Issue Four I suggested that most zine reviews consist of little more than a run down on games being run, waiting lists and some pat-on-the-back remark. There is very rarely any attempt at appraising the zine's intrinsic worth and commenting on its content.

This *has* become the standard approach to zine-reviewing, if you don't believe me reread almost any recent zine. Because this is the standard new editors take it up without realising what they are doing. In doing so they perpetuate a style of zine-reviewing where the emphasis is on pleasing the editor's ego rather than providing solid information for the reader.

In *C'Est Mag* 115 (*June 1992*) Pete Sullivan wrote:

"Mark suggests that most zine<sup>2</sup> reviews are inspired by "blatant toadism — You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Whilst this may happen unconsciously sometimes, the only zine<sup>3</sup> editor I know who ever explicitly approached zine<sup>4</sup> reviews that way was Matthew Wright, of *Life, the Universe and A(Par)*. Unfortunately, *Life* was so appalling that no-one was prepared to toady back...

*C'Est Mag* is one of the best zines in the Hobby for hobby news as each issue Pete writes a short comment on all the zine's that he has received since his previous issue. These comments are not 'reviews', but taken together they provide a remarkable snap-shot of the hobby. If you want to know what's happening then *C'Est Mag* is the place to go.

By focusing on what is being discussed in a zine, rather than on the zine itself, Pete can provide a distorted picture of the zine. Indeed in his endeavours to look on the bright side of any zine he falls into the trap of "blatant toadism". Consider the following sequence of reviews.

<sup>1</sup> Actually it contains Crazy Markie writings about the Hobby.

<sup>2</sup> ethnic spelling corrected

<sup>3</sup> ethnic spelling corrected

<sup>4</sup> Ethnic spelling corrected

"**Now Eat The Rabbit** turns up with a special pre-holidays issue, featuring both a giant lettercolumn (in which William Whyte copies yours truly by presenting letters 'unchopped' — or is it just a case of great minds think alike?) and the results of the 'Anti-Quiz' from last year. I achieved joint second place in this, although mine (& everyone else's) score of 999 looked a bit low compared to the winner's Fifteen billion thousand pi and a half (which I make approx.  $4.712389 \times 10^{13}$ ). There was also a special supplement containing what purports to be the Politics lettercol, but which is in fact the Political Theory lettercol. As a free service, I present the Politics graduate's general rule of thumb: if it contains the word "Marxism" it's political theory, if it contains the word "Communism" it's politics." *C'Est Mag* 103 (*August 1991*)

"**Now Eat The Rabbitt** Volume II Issue I manages a comparatively thin issue, as William Whyte managed to slip in an issue between return from summer holidays *en famille* and Inter-railing before going to Oxford for Postgraduate work in October. As well as commenting on San Fransico and the U.S in general (that's General, Arizona<sup>TM</sup>), William gives a 'thumbs-down' to Umberto Eco's Foucault's Pendulum for reasons I can understand if not agree with. There are also the final version of the rules for Dail Eireann (a.k.a 'William's Irish Election Game'), together with various hints that William is contemplating semi-pro production of the game, presumably on the David Watts/Rostherne Games model. It's certainly a good enough game to try." *C'Est Mag* 105 (*September 1991*)

"**Now Eat The Rabbitt's** May 1989 issue is the first from William Whyte as he starts his postgraduate course at Oxford. As well as comparative reviews of Budapest, Prague and Berlin from his inter-railing over the summer, this issue contains some distinctly dodgy writing on Chaos Theory from Mark Weston, which brings a suitable riposte from William. In the meantime, the subzine<sup>5</sup> Sartori from Doktor Pete Strover continues to run the Utterly Ludicrous Diplomacy game, the only Diplomacy game where combat is resolved not by force of arms, but by philosophical argument..." *C'Est Mag* 107 (*November 1991*)

"**Now Eat the Rabbitt** pops up from William Whyte, now settling down to Postgraduate life at Oxford. This issue has William going through all the zines<sup>6</sup> he gets picking out little snippets to say about each of them, an idea I may steal some time. It also features the only extant game of Utterly Ludicrous Diplomacy, a variant where the success or otherwise of the moves is dependent on philosophical argument, being run by "Doktor" Pete Strover, Nicholas Whyte's game of Government is also just starting." *C'Est Mag* 109 (*January 1992*)

"**Now Eat The Rabbit** and a half is a small issue, but with a good mix of hobby comment, book reviews and letters. David Oya pops up in the lettercolumn to castigate train-spotters and going to railway stations to spot trains. As he says, "Where's the skill in that? If they were to go, say, to an oil rig in the North Sea to spot trains they would gain my underlying respect and admiration. Particularly if they didn't come back..." Amen to that." *C'Est Mag* 112 (*March 1992*)

"**Now Eat The Rabbit** (the numberless one) has an interesting layout, with pages pasted-up on old R.R maps, Baycon flyers and Natural Law Party leaflets. It also has quite possibly the most accurate Election Prediction Chart ever published, with the traditional Conservative-percentage-vote-along-the-top-and-Labour-Percentage-vote% -down-the-side. Virtually every space (including the eventual result) has "651 fuck-wits" as the prediction." *C'Est Mag* 113 (*April 1992*)

"**Now Eat the Rabbit** "76" is severely hit on the games front by the recent Irish postal strike [...]. However, there's the usual excellent "Rational Being Comic" strip, and a bits-and-pieces lettercolumn & sweepies on films, writing, politics and hobbynews. This zine<sup>7</sup> has broken away from domination by the stagnant issues of scientific theory and political theory, and is now

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<sup>5</sup>ethnic spelling corrected

<sup>6</sup>ethnic spelling corrected.

<sup>7</sup>ethnic spelling corrected

interesting again.” C’Est Mag 115 (June 1992).

This series of reviews provides an accurate guide to the type of material being covered in NERTZ over the period covered, although there is little attempt made to evaluate *how* that material is covered. What are we to make of Pete’s claim in C’Est Mag 115 that NERTZ has emerged from a period of stagnation, when he never reported it entering one? “Blatant toadism?” A classic example!

“In C’Mag Pete Sullivan points fun at Mark’s recent claim that most zine reviewers try to say nice things rather than genuinely reviewing the zine, and then goes on to demonstrate how true it actually was by saying of NERTZ “This zine has broken away from domination by the stagnant issues of scientific theory and political theory, and is now interesting again”, having previously never said anything even remotely like “This zine is dominated by the stagnant issues of scientific theory and political theory, and is a bit boring”. But then, expecting consistency from people is missing the point a bit, isn’t it? William Whyte in NERTZ Part Two (July 1992)

### The Zine Review<sup>8</sup>

Is there a difference between reviews that are written for inclusion in a non-review zine and reviews that are written specifically for a review-zine? Or rather, should there be a difference?

There are few, if any, restrictions on an editor writing a review in the sanctuary of his own zine or on anyone writing a review to be printed in a non-review zine. In these cases the reviewer should be stating in his opinion, evaluating the zine, but is a review zine the place for criticism on style and content?<sup>9</sup>

What is the point of a review zine? Is it to present a brave face on fandom so that the uninitiated gains the most glowing view possible? Is it to show that Fandom’s Brave New Cloths are not so clean and shiny but instead a collection of battered and worn, tried and tasted? There is no reason why reviews in a review-zine should be sterile and bland.

It is axiomatic that different people prefer different zines, there can be no one way to produce a diplomacy zine. Differing styles may have different admirers, and differing numbers of admirers, but it is the fanzine reviewers obligation to review the zine as he sees it; a reviewer does not repeat the popular view of the popular fanzine and if others see things differently then it is their duty to say so. The popular position is not necessarily the critics position. The bottom line is that if you are submitting a review for inclusion in a review-zine then submit the same sentiments as you’d express if you were writing for any other zine.

How does one judge how successful a review-zine is? Is it the circulation figure, the regard it is held by its peers or some other quantity?

A review-zine is judged by how well it reviews zines and how well it achieves the aims of the editors. And mindless platitudes does not make a review-zine. However there is a difference between ‘fair’ and ‘unfair’ review (something that Iain Bowen was unable to grasp).

One problem with *Mission From God* is that it contains too many uncritical positive reviews. Is it so unfair to comment that a letter comment has become stagnant, or that an editor over-uses his dtp equipment?

Andrew York asks me to quantify how production values should be mentioned in a review. For some people production-values are the most important aspect of any zine. However the questions is not ‘is this

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<sup>9</sup>Recall D. West’s definition of fandom, “the game played with style.”

zine a laser-printed dtp production with maps?' but 'how does the editor use the resources that he has available?' Just as you can't criticise a warehouse zine for having no letter-column then you can't criticise a dot-matrix printed zine for not having the same clarity as a laser-printed zine. You may be able to criticise the editor for the many in which he uses his printer and point our ways in which the zine can be improved, but you can't (or shouldn't) criticise it for being something that it isn't.

## ZINE-NAMES

Several articles have been written on the naming of zines. I reprint the following without comment.

"Trouble is I keep thinking up new names I'd like to see adopted. **Cui Bono** is short, sharp and (for a Diplomacy zine) to the point." Pete Doubleday in **HOME** 68 (April 1987)

## THE POSTPERSON COMETH

Peter Sullivan 16 Neile Close, Romanby, NORTHALLERTON. DL7 8NN 18th June 1992

"You have, no doubt, realised the biggest problem with **TMNE** is that the audience it is primarily intended for (your **Brother Initiates**) will inevitably give you any feedback face to face and not bother to LoC the zine.<sup>10</sup> I suppose I shall make an effort this time..."

"We're still waiting for the other four zines<sup>11</sup> to go with **Yer Tiz** as "one of the Worst Five Zines"<sup>12</sup> I have had the misfortune to see." Name names, dammit sire, or retract!"

"I noticed from the latest **Greatest Hits** hat you have resorted to Birkism, i.e. re-using parts of the zine<sup>13</sup> as a letter to another editor (or vice versa). Is this fannish?"

"The definitive article on hobby class-structures can be found in **C'Est Magnifique** issue 43, which divides the Hobby, like Gaul, into three parts: The Golden Oldies, The Yuppie Fruppies and the Gibson Flyerites (now re-christened Springboarders.) Reprint if you want, but at your own risk."

"I've never received anything from Andrew York; leaving aside the possibility that he is another Nelson pseudonym, the only possibilities are that it was sent to the wrong address (27 Farrer Street has been a dead letter drop for at least two years, and as for me college address...) or that either the U.S.P.S or the G.P.O have lost it. Any zeen<sup>14</sup> I receive gets a mention in the "Sweepies" Section, and this is normally enough to ensure that I remember to send a copy of the relevant issue back."

**The Crazy One** *It's difficult to quantify other zines which deserve the accolade of 'Worst Five Zines'. Irregularity is not in itself sufficient to be classed in this category and for this reason I would exclude **Quartz** from the list. I don't think that **Froggy** qualifies, if we ignore it's non-fold then there is no reason to consider it. **The Mercurial Messenger** is a strong candidate, a classic example of why starting small and building up is the best way to run a zine! **Yer Tiz** springs to mind as a zine that would qualify. Thought for the day: Steve Agar wants to trade with every zine, does this mean he's offered Andy Bate a trade?*

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<sup>10</sup>ethnic spelling corrected

<sup>11</sup>ditto

<sup>12</sup>ditto

<sup>13</sup>ditto

<sup>14</sup>...

Andrew York P.O.Box 2307, Universal City, TX 78148-1307, USA 21st July 1992

“I think there is a big difference between a general review and a critical review. I feel the review zines should be general reviews, not critical reviews as you seem to think.”

“Review zines should be a listing of the hobby’s publications, what games they provide, their cost, things such as that. The primary focus should be to provide interested folk information on zines they may be interested in.”

**The Crazy One** *This would not be a review-zine but a listings zine, a subtle, but important, difference.*

“I don’t know of a single publisher that won’t send a sample upon request — let the individual look at the publication and determine whether they want to sub.”

“I really dislike hobby service reviews (such as in the **Zine Register**) that are critical reviews. These only hurt the publisher and drive away potential readers/players that may be satisfied with the publication as is.”

“For instance, in **Zine Register** #19 comments were made about my lack of maps, my ‘format’ and such. Well, if the reviewer had asked, I could have explained that with my current computer system, that was the best I could do. I couldn’t fit his ‘high-powered, fast computer, with top-of-the-line word processor/desk-top publishing software and laser printer standards’ with my C-64 and dot matrix printer. He should have promoted the positive elements of my ‘zine (subzines, turn-around time, GM’ing, et al). Let the subber ask for a sample and decide from that whether a subscription is worth it.”

“Since I’ve never seen **GIGO** or its reviews I can’t comment on the specific situation. However, a hobbywide zine should have the emphasis on the positive sides of the zine — leaving the subber to make the final determination.”

“You mention that there are basic ingrediants for criticism. In some respects I agree with you; however, most people have different ideas of what each is. Take, for instance, ‘Presentation’ — what is the standard you compare the zine to? Is not having a laser printer a negative point; or, is the readability of the game reports important. I say state the basics, give emphasis to the positive points and let the reader get a sample or a short term subscription, and have them decide if this is a zine for them. Leave the critical comments for private letters and personal comments.”

“The primary premise of the hobby review zines should be to get people interested in looking at new zines, not flaying zines for perceived failures. After all, with rare exceptions, the hobby is more vibrant and stronger for a publisher putting out a zine than for one folding due to ‘substandard equipment’, slow turnaround or bad spelling.”

**The Crazy One** *Any zine editor that folds because of criticism of their ‘substandard equipment’, ‘slow turnaround’ or ‘bad spelling’ is unlikely to one that is missed by the hobby.*

Andrew Moss (5 Meadow Rise, Littlers Cross, Winsford, CHESHIRE. CW7 2NT) July 1992

“I very much enjoyed your issue of **Mission From Ghod**, largely because **Age of Reason** dodged the bullets and received some welcome kudos. Also because I don’t like train spotters or computer nerds anymore than you do.”

“However I do confess to still being confused by your terminology. Any chance of an idiots guide to ‘neo-fan’, ‘TurboPhreak’, and ‘fannishness’. We really should have covered this over a pint or two at ManorCon but there never seems to be quite enough time.”

**The Crazy One** ‘neo-fan’ comes from ‘neo’ meaning new/recent and ‘fan’ meaning fan.<sup>15</sup> Literally ‘new fan’, someone who has only recently discovered fandom and is accordingly wide-eyed and unsure of themselves. What then is the difference between neofan and novice? A novice would be someone who is new to diplomacy. To label this zine a ‘neo-fan free zone’ is a joke, anyone sufficiently interested in the diplomacy hobby to want to see this zine is surely not a neo-fan!

William Whyte in *Nertz Part Two* (July 1992) defines TurboPhreakism as “being the growing habit, particularly in the American Hobby, of reviewing a zine purely on the basis of its turnaround length, its number of GMing errors and the computer packages that generated the maps.”

It can also be used to describe TurboPhreak Harris’, see his letter in *Springboard* 59 (July 1992): Toby complained that Danny listed only 12 out of the 20 different games in progress, that there were 11 games with waiting lists open that Danny forgot to mention and that Danny only mentioned 3 from 7 of the subzines in *Smodnoc*.

‘Fannishness’? Ask me at ManorCon next year!

Jack McHugh, 280 Sanford Road, Upper Darby, PA 19082, USA. 12th July 1992

“I still say the ‘pond’ is a British thing. ‘Impressive command of American’...wow, we’ve got our own language now! Or do you just believe Shaw was right when he said England and America were separated by a common language? Try using real American slang like, cheesesteaks, sneakers or grottee.”

“I agree with your comments on the hobby awards, I think you’re one of my smarter toadies. Perhaps we need to lengthen the time between hobby awards. Maybe once every three years or just give out one award per year. Do you have problem with a cliquey committing nominating the same old people, like we do in the US, over and over again?”

“Your absolutely right about the ‘Melinda Ann Holley Award for Quantity Participation’ Award being ‘a waste of time.’ I also agree it is a travesty to have an award that actively encourages people to get in over their heads and burn out. The real problem, Mark, is that the original intent behind the Melinda Award was for it to be an award for ‘outstanding Hobby female’ or some such nonsense. The few females in our hobby got upset and said they didn’t like it so Ron Cameron changed it to what it is today. Ron should have simply dropped the award.”

“I dislike Eric Brosius throwing out the top and bottom votes in the Runestone Poll since I fail to see the rational for it. It is better than throwing out the ‘feud’ votes but not much better. I also like your idea for measuring the effect of throwing out the awards. Better still, let’s come up with a rational for doing it at all.”

“As for Mike Lowrey’s article in *Diplomacy World*; I thought it was great. When you read a +70 page publication, like Eric’s on the poll results that uses all the stats code words, it is tough not to take it seriously as scientific opinion. As I said to Eric in last issue, when you go into an analysis that detailed people will take it seriously.”

Jack McHugh, 280 Sanford Road, Upper Darby, PA 19082, USA. 26th July 1992

“Toading with Sir Jack? Yes, I think I rather like that phrase. You’ll do fine as my toady after all, perhaps even eclipsing my own American toady, Doug Kent. What a feather in your cap!!!”

**The Crazy One** You don’t know what that means to me Jack, you’ve just made me a happy Brit!

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<sup>15</sup>Which surely should be phan, neo-phan?

“What’s this ‘fanac’ word? Is this some Brit word for fanatic?”

*The Crazy One Sigh, another one! Fanac is short for fan-activity, or what fans do. Writing for fanzines, going to conventions and running a fanzine is fanac. In our hobby playing in postal games also constitutes fan-ac.*

“David Hood had to do a lot of fancy footwork to get **Diplomacy World** back in everyone’s good graces after the years that Larry spent making **DW** the laughing stock of the hobby.”

“Larry not only attacks people, he takes credit for cleansing the hobby of people he considers to be bad for the hobby. Course if that were really true Larry would have cleansed the hobby of his presence long ago. As you’ve noted Larry attacks anyone with a brain in their head and anyone who doesn’t subscribe to the Larry Perry fan club gets pummeled by Larry.”

“I’m shocked that your so behind on your American that you’re not familiar with the terms ‘cheesesteak’ and ‘grotee’. The former is merely a steak sandwich with cheese, should you ever come to Philadelphia I will take you to Pat’s Steaks in south Philly and buy you a real cheesesteak. As for the latter it is Valley girlspeak and is short for grotesque.”

“I did see Iain Bowen’s interpretation of me. We had a Jack McHugh impersonation contest at Dixie Con. Only Iain and Steve Nicewarner entered. Steve won because he is American and sounded more like me, I suspect I would sound like Iain’s interpretation if I were Welsh. Even though Iain can be a bit of a snot at times, we got along very well, I thought, and look forward to meeting him again.”

“I didn’t go to DipCon but I talked to Bob Acheson. He told me the North California bid, Pacific Con won the bid for next year’s DipCon. It was a very close bid between Southern CA—Strategic Con—and Northern CA. I was told it was decided by one vote. Larry Perry’s Perry Con in Salt Lake City, Utah, got one vote—his, really in touch with the hobby isn’t Larry?”

Jack McHugh, 280 Sanford Road, Upper Darby, PA 19082, USA. 09th August 1992

“When it comes to Dip Con you’re so misinformed, thanks to Fred Davis, I’m not sure where to begin. Dip Con ‘82 was messed up thanks to Fred and Mark Berch lying to the Atlantic Con organizer and claiming they represented Robert Sacks. When Sacks refused to run Dip Con under Fred and Mark, they ran it themselves and messed it up. As for ‘83, I wasn’t at that con but everyone who was there said that it was a great con. Fred has perpetuated this myth that Dip Con was ‘mistreated’.”

“The big cons in the US, like Origins, Atlantic Con and Pacific Con etc., etc., all want Dip Con since we bring in people — maybe not a lot, but we always bring in some people who wouldn’t otherwise go.”

“Dip Con should be with a big gaming con every few years to get some new blood. Certainly I don’t think it should be with a big con every year, I wouldn’t mind if DipCon was with a major con every year, but I can understand those who disagree.”

“Dip Con usually gets good publicity in the hobby press. However that only attracts those who already play pbm dip. If we want to go outside the same old people we have to go where the non pbm people are.”

“Can Con is exactly the type of con I don’t want to see Dip Con become. I mean they only had 16 people last year. I think Can Con wants non pbm players but they only advertise through the hobby press so I don’t see how they will get any; if you don’t read them you won’t know about Can Con. The CDO is nothing more than Cal’s time and Doug’s money.”

“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)*

