

September

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (~~August~~ 1992)

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

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This is **West Riding Press Publications 219**

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

Mark Boyle.

Say it more slowly Mark Boyle.

Savour the words slowly as you roll them around your tongue, like a good wine, or spit them out quickly if you are the keeper of the Holy Grail and then go to wash out your mouth with soap; hard white soap in an attempt to regain your purity.

Mark first attracted attention with his campaign of 1987, a cheeky little number, to spike the Zine Poll on the grounds that it was unfair that only diplomacy zines should be eligible for the Diplomacy Zine Poll.

I admit that for some time I was under no illusion, Mark Boyle was Satan: an evil no-good soccerdrosser who was bringing ruin to the once great Diplomacy Hobby and whose presence ever zine in the land cried out against. Boyle was nothing, Boyle should get out, get out, of the Hobby and back to the land of soccerdross zines which had spawned him and then tried to shove him in our direction, an unwanted child.

Things have changed since those far-off days and Mark Boyle is now one of the more interesting commentators, and writers, on the diplomacy hobby. Indeed it is a shame that he hides his talent in the backwaters of *Scorpio*, which isn't a diplomacy zine and, arguable, isn't part of the diplomacy hobby, and does not have a subzine in a more mainstream publication. Mark's non-hobby writing is also interesting and I look forward to his transition into zine editor.

Perhaps he feels that he has to hide in the backwaters, in a place seldom visited by civilised man, in an attempt to evade the posses that are sent out occasionally by the Piggott/Walkerdine/Bowen Triumvirate in an attempt to bring him to trial for 'Crimes against the Zine Poll'.

Scorpio 57 (September 1992) contains Boyle at his best, and worst. Having been instrumental in the events that led up to the formation of the ZOTY Poll (or was he, see anon), it seems that Mark has been running a campaign against the way in which ZOTY has been run since the day it was spawned. Attempt after attempt to reform the Poll has crashed against the indifference of a succession of Pollster's. Is Mark doomed to spend an eternity wondering through Fandom, cursed never to find the One True Poll that he has spent so long seeking?

¹ Actually it contains Crazy Markie writings about the Hobby.

“Remember in this very zine Pete Burrows asked for an explanation of the Preference Matrix system? Remember in the **Rotten Easter Special** Pete said he would be hopefully printing details in ZOTY ‘92’s result booklet? Well best beloved, having been given less than a week to reply to his request and so doing it during my lunchbreaks studying at Uni, then ZOTY not coming out for a long time after, I discover when it does finally shuffle out that Pete instead has printed half a page saying I’d sent him details of the PM system and a claim he will be writing to as many GMs and editors he knows to get their views. After all my bloody time and trouble, he doesn’t print what I’d sent him in the results booklet! Why? That was the obvious place to start discussing it! What we do get is 2½ pages of zine reviews, two he’d not even seen at the time and one Professional; wouldn’t list how many votes each zine got; had a voters list he couldn’t be bothered to list alphabetically; all in all 12 A5 pages — for which we get charged £1! For someone so fond of ‘value for money’ that some took gall. Is this man serious? Is this some sort of joke — ‘cos if it is I ain’t laughing!” Mark Boyle in **Scorpio** 57 *September 1992*).

Here are Mark’s comments on the history of ZOTY.

“It’s coming onto the fifth ZOTY and it doesn’t look like it. It’ll take more than time to sort this out, it’ll take discussion and ACTION! The first two wins were ludicrous enough, because of a system picked to ensure **Froggy**, Kev’s² favourite zine — and whose editor, Andy Bate, played a big part in its clandestine creation (whilst I was openly putting forward my own proposals for an alternative Poll) before it suddenly appeared without so much as a trumpet fanfare (this severely pissed off John Piggott, quite correctly, because such secretive scheming did seem highly dubious at this time) — won. It, of course, failed to do this. When Pete ((Burrows)) took over, he allowed his own zine to remain eligible, so it was no surprise that under the cumulative vote system **Puma** walked it, and certainly no surprise that many cried ‘Fix’ — one reader of **Five Year Plan** went so far as to say “Pete Burrows is as bent as a banana!” Then came this year’s shenanigans. ZOTY 92 looks a grim prospect.” Mark Boyle in **Scorpio** 51 (*February 1992*).

One amusing aspect of the ZOTY debate is that Mark has resorted to reprinting comments from an old enemy³, John Piggott, in an attempt to show how said poll should be run. Doubtless Piggott is turning in his grave even as I write this. (This from **Eggbert’s Zine**, yet another Mark Boyle zine title — why can’t he be sensible and have one title?) **Eggbert’s Zine** also contains some research on how the hiking of deposits in 1987⁴ effected the number of fringe candidates in the 1987 General Election, compared to the 1983 Election. Not surprisingly all the minor parties, with the exception of The Greens, were virtually wiped out. The National Front went down from 60 to 3, the BNP down from 53 to 2, the Communists down from 38 to 10, The Official Raving Loony Party down from 24 to 5, the Workers Revolutionary Part down from 21 to 2. Only that well know group the Wessex Regionalists remained the same, at 10. Mark’s article appeared before the 1992 election, an update is welcomed. In fact the timing of this article *is* strange, one would have thought it better to hold it over until after the 1992 election in an attempt to gain more data. Mark can claim that this way he gets to run the same article twice, which is awfully clever of him, but running the same article twice just downgrades the worth of the article. Slapped hands to Mr Boyle on this one.

“By the way, if we had P.R; the Greens and NF would have 7 seats apiece, the Communists 6, the Loonies 5, the NBP 3, the WRP 2 and the Wessex Regionalists 2.” Mark Boyle in **Eggbert’s Zine** (*March 1992*)

²Kevin Lloyd

³As we shall see latter Mark has a number of old enemies. ‘Must be a fannish fan’

⁴the deposit rose from £150 to £500

I think these figures refer to the 1983 election, and that they are a load of rubbish! (If they are not a 'load of rubbish' they refer to a PR system best described as a 'load of rubbish') What certainly is not a load of rubbish is Mark's 4-page RJW cartoon at the end of the zine, which I am negotiating at this very moment to reprint...

Mark has gloated that the ZOTY received more votes, 156, this year than the Zine Poll, 142. Surely all this shows is that there is a need for two separate polls and that to have one all-encompassing poll would be meaningless? I would be interested to learn how many people voted in both, ah but that would require Iain Bowen to produce a Results Booklet and with the huge amount of work required in producing one I don't think that very likely.⁵

Passing over news of Mark's recent graduation and news on the various European United Tournaments (which *are* interesting) we reach the Gladys Awards where Mark has sound views, although I wouldn't agree that *Zeeby* was a "badly printed piece of bumwipe dedicated to patronising as many hobby members as possible". Complaining that the Rusty Bolts are no more, he notes in passing that "the joke was soured by Kinzett turning it into a 'personal' set of awards for his cronies to mouth off at all the more talented members of the hobby then themselves", he launches a new set of Bolts⁶. I expect this to be every bit as successful as the Gladrags were, although Mark may use at least two sets of votes which is double the number young Harry achieved.

I think that Kinzett is one of the K entries on Mark Boyle's Enemies list, although the following is certainly is most perceptive.

"Let's face it, the Dip side of the hobby is gagging for some decent editors. Look what's happened the last few years — Challenger gone, Egan gone, Bairstow gone (after a long zine illness). The only two I can see worth two sods are Bond and Nelson and the latter's restricted by Uni work. It's very dispiriting I can say."

Mark closes with some calm, reasoned and friendly comments about an old 'friend' of his 'drosser Andrew McCormak... NOT! Another notch on Mark Boyle's Enemies List

Controversial...? Yes! Informed...? Yes! Entertaining...? Yes! I only wish Mark would integrate more fully into the mainstream of the diplomacy hobby, we can't afford to let such an interesting writer slip through our fingers.

Many are the words used to describe Toby Harris, indeed varied are the words of the High Holy Fans at the righteous meetings of the NYGB. *Smodnoc* 42 (*August 1992*) contains some observations on this year's ManorCon, in particularly on the number of wins.⁷

"So, why were there so many outright wins? Well, we had a lot of newcomers this year. I take nothing away from the three ((Saturday)) winners at all (a win is a win and deserves the highest of accolades) but I must say that I didn't recognise any of the players on Phil's ((Day, 1988 and 1992 ManorCon winner)) or Vick's ((Hall)) table. This isn't to say that the opposition was weak, but I think there is some correlation between unknown and inexperienced players." Toby Harris in *Smodnoc* 42 (*August 1992*).

⁵The inability of the Pollster to either produce a booklet or produce a convincing explanation for the lack of a booklet would be a worthy topic for future discussion, except I rather approve of the non-booklet.

⁶Categories are/were Upstart of The Year, Least Regretted/Most Eagerly Desired Zine Fold, Worst Postal Games Player, Feud of the Year, Zaniest Press Writer of The Year and Bullshitter of the Year

⁷four 18-center wins over two rounds, a ManorCon record

This year, as last year, I volunteered to help run the diplomacy tournament on Saturday afternoon (at least Pete Sullivan tells me that I volunteered...) and this year I was even afforded the 'privilege' (at least Pete tells me it's a privilege...) of discussing the tournament rules prior to the tournament. At ManorCon my impression was that fewer of the good/top players entered this year and that there *was* a significant decrease in standards. Xavier Blanchot commented that, on a tactical/strategical level, the standard in England is the worst in Europe... and GMing at ManorCon convinced me that he is right! To take a simple example. Phil Day won his game as Russia by taking Serbia as his 18th center, Turkey order A(Serbia)II and A(Con)H. This is poor play.

Another example is Shaun Derrick's win as a 20-centre France. Here the position was a 14-14-6 with Germany on 14 and Turkey on 6. (Possible Shaun was Germany, I can't remember.) He convinced his ally to eliminate Turkey and get the 2-way draw. Guess what happened at the end? Good diplomacy on Shaun's part, but poor judgement on his allies.

Declining standards of play were not the main reason for the increase in the number of wins, despite it being true that most (if not all) wins result from poor play — is it possible to win a game of diplomacy against six good players?

No, the most important reason for the three Saturday wins was that the Saturday round was open-ended. Two of the three wins occurred after play would have *ended* in the ol'e days. The new open-ended rule⁸ encourages players to stab their ally(s) and go for a win.

A few years ago (possible 1989) Toby Harris had 17 centers in a Saturday game with a 50-50 guess for 18 on the very last season, he guessed wrong and had to settle for a draw. Under the new rules that game would have continued until the players agreed a result and I fancy that Toby would have played on for a few hours.

Comment on the ManorCon scoring system has recently come from a surprising source, Richard Sharp in *Dolchstoß*. I think it a little unfair for Guy Thomas to complain, as he does in *Dolchstoß167* (*September 1992*), that Richard should actually understand, or even read, the tournament scoring system before criticising them. I don't believe that it's fair to expect Richard to let insignificant and inconsequential things such as facts get in a way of a good letter-generator. Guy calls the ManorCon scoring system "*the best yet devised for Diplomacy tournament play*".

"I don't see the need for scoring systems at all myself — what's wrong with playing to the rules of the game? A win is a win; a draw is a draw; a game not finished within the time limit is a draw between the survivors unless one or more of them can conclusively demonstrate a better result which can be forced. I particularly object to any system that distinguishes between participants in a draw on the basis of supply centre count, which [...] it sounds as if the ManorCon one may do." Richard Sharp in *Dolchstoß167* (*September 1992*).

I believe that Mr Sharp may have once played in a diplomacy tournament, circa 1975. Richard's comments re wins/draws would carry more weight if his own rating system followed the principles that he outlines, unfortunately they don't. But as I stated above, facts should play little part in any discussion, indeed resorting to them normally means that you don't have a very strong argument.

In answer to a readership question Richard runs stats on how the number of new zines (as shown by the BNC records) has varied in recent years. These figures naturally exclude zines which has never ran Diplomacy, but Richard would argue that such zines aren't part of the Diplomacy Hobby.

⁸In case you don't go to ManorCon: Games on the Saturday are played with no fixed time-limit. They end when all players are happy with the result

“Since the hobby started in 1969, the most zines launched in one year has been 26 in 1973, and the fewest 0 in 1971; at present 1992 is the worst year since 1971. There has been a steady decline since 1984 with a minor recovery in 1991 — figures from 1984 onwards are 19, 18, 13, 12, 10, 7, 4, 7, 2. Not a very encouraging scenario, really.” Richard Sharp, *Dolchstoß*167 (*September 1992*).

The steady decrease in new zines since 1984 (when *Imagine* folded, is that significant?) and which has accelerated since *Springboard* became the starting place for so many novices (that is significant) has been known for some years. In itself I don't think that it is particularly worrying, there is nothing wrong with having a smaller, more compact, hobby (by zine numbers). What is more worrying is that there are fewer games of diplomacy being played and, I believe, fewer members of the hobby.

Prompted by Richard Sharp's figures I looked at *The Numbers Game #2 (July 1986)*, which contained RJW's stats for the number of zines starting each year between 1969 and 1985.

YEAR	NUMBER OF ZINE STARTS	YEAR	NUMBER OF ZINE STARTS
1969	2	1978	13
1970	1	1979	14
1971	0	1980	12
1972	9	1981	13
1973	13	1982	28
1974	19	1983	15
1975	18	1984	32
1976	9	1985	25
1977	19		

After Walkerdine, 1986.

There are two reasons why the numbers in RJW's and RS's surveys differ. RJW counted by 'year of zine start' whilst RS counted by 'year of first BN issued'. This leads onto the second reason, RJW includes all those zines that he considered to be part of the postal diplomacy hobby (I don't agree with all his choices) whilst RS only included those zines that have started a game of diplomacy.

But why are there are so few new zines? The reason is simple. These days many (most?) people introduced to the hobby are introduced to it by *Springboard* and Danny Collman. In recent months the likes of Steve Doubleday, William Whyte, Pete Sullivan and Iain Bowen have all commented that if they had entered the hobby via *Springboard* they'd have dropped out fairly quickly. The obvious answer is therefore that Danny Collman drives most proto-editors out of the hobby before they even discover what the hobby is. And how can they discover what the hobby is when that simple task is beyond Danny?

Can we provide any evidence to support this statement? By combining the RS and RJW surveys, taking RJW's figures from the years that overlap, we discover that there have been approximately 300 zines started in the UK since 1969. From an earlier statement of Richard Sharp's (not reported here) we know that there have been in the order of 4000 people who have played in at least one game of postal diplomacy. This means that, approximately, one person in thirteen has started a dip zine.

Since *Springboard* was launched it has started just over 50 diplomacy games, that's some 350 people it has launched into the diplomacy hobby. From the above figures we would expect that there would have been about twenty-five zines produced by people introduced to the hobby by Danny. Which mainstream diplomacy zines have been launched by ex-*Springboard* players? I'm not entirely too sure about the origins of all the recent new-editors. Certainly there's *Garbage In, Garbage Out* and possible *The Laughing Roundhead* and...

Some of our fanzines have gone missing, and Collman's to blame.

Dolchstoß has been a source of some diplomacy stats recently. Issue 166 (*August 1992*) contained details on eliminations from UK postal games.

"Ignoring dropouts, there have been 3105 eliminations in completed games, an average of just over 2 a game. Austria is eliminated much more often than anyone else, and France much less often, the league table being: A 618, G 457, I 444, E 435, R 428, T 424, F 299."

"49 people share the melancholy distinction of being eliminated in 1902, 43 of them as Austria. The others are 3 Frenchmen, 2 Germans and apparently 1 Russian, though I find this almost inconceivable and will have to look into it! Does so: well, this was a chap called Andrew McCormack in 1987EJ—**Scorpio** (*Black Widow*). He opened GOB, Ukr, Sil, Arm and gained nothing in 1901... Turkey gained Rum in 1901..."

"Another remarkable case was 1987BG—**Sharp Practice** (*Banner*) in which Austria and Germany were *both* out in 1902."

"Eliminations in 1903 are relatively commonplace (200), and again more than half (103) are Austrian. The best chance of surviving until 1904 is offered by playing Italy."

"The most common year of elimination for each country is: A 1903, G 1904, E 1905, I 1906, others 1907." Richard Sharp in **Dolchstoß** 166 (*August 1992*).

Richard reveals, in answer to another readership question, that 23% of all finished games have had no dropouts. This includes zines such as **NMR!** which had non-standard definitions of dropping-out (if I remember correctly you couldn't drop out of a **NMR** game if you were still in credit) and the 'real figure' is nearer to 18%. "*Exactly half (161/332) have been outright wins, half draws. The winning countries are, roughly: R/F/G = 1st; A/I/E = 4th; T well last*" (Richard Sharp)

This issue is remarkable for the inclusion of a Pete Sullivan letter, who is becoming quite a letterhack in his dotage. In view of his performance at the last Yorkmeet one wonders how long it took for him to read this issue, one assumes at the very least that this is a well-thumbed issue... Then there's DS 48 (1991-BX) which has the unusual sight of a French F(BLA) in Spring 1908 with Turkey still in the game, although reduced to (Arm).

Despite the adverse comments that are made about **Smodnoc** Toby does trade with 14 zines, which is not only an acceptable number in the hobby of the 1990's but is significantly higher than the hobby norm. But not everyone either understands why trading is a good idea, or what the hobby is. **Andy Bear** writes that "*trading zines for the sake of trading is fine if you have nothing better to do. I don't think it'll Save The Hobby in itself, though.*" (**Electric Monk** 40 (*August 1992*)), a particularly unperceptive and unremarkable comment even coming from a bear.

Mr. Bear had had a great deal to say recently about the hobby and hobby discussion: what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's bad, what's in and what's out. Yet not only do the Bears have a policy of excluding all reviews from **MFG** which are in any way, or form, worthy of being called a review but, mysteriously, it appears that the several critical letters that have been written to them (none by me, I hasten to add) about their non critical review zine have all failed to be published. This isn't the first time that the bears have resorted to careful pruning of their letter column to create a distorted picture of their mail; Iain Bowen mutters a letter mailed in response to their review of **Y Ddraig Goch** 50, which failed to see print: Purely on the grounds that he contained some negative comments, negative personal comments; but if you don't know I'd better not say...⁹

⁹This sentence was funded by the Doug Acheson Memorial Fund For Shorter Sentences

But I'm digressing. Mention of a recent issue of **Smodnoc** leads to the latest issue of **NERTZ** where William carries on his, much respected, ManorCon campaign. William knows the meaning of the words tact and diplomacy. He also knows the meaning of the word subtle, this is probably why he's at Oxford and I'm in Leeds. The first six pages of **Nertz** come complete with a subliminal message which is certainly a great deal more subtle than William's PA announcements at this year's ManorCon. If this were SFdom we could, and would, call William a major fanwriter stylist, but we can't so we'll just say that he has a way with words, particularly in the sardonic understatement.

The Abyssinian Prince # 119 (August 1992) Jim Burgess may not know where his towel is, but he certainly knows where his fanzine is. At \$0.50 an issue the zine is ridiculously cheap for North American; it's even cheaper for non North-Americans since Jim will send you the zine free. Jim believes that creating international links is a Good Thing and the best way to do that is by sending the zine free to anyone who expresses an interest in seeing it.

And if you're prepared to make a contribution then ask Jim to mail you the zine. It's a mix of letters and games, with much emphasis in the lettercolumn on music. There's some very knowledgeable people contributing and whatever your tastes, you're almost certain to find someone on a similar wave band to yourself.

Maniac's Paradise 43 (October 1992) carries a hefty issue of Jack McHugh's subzine which runs to 18 pages, mostly letters. There are letters from Eric Brosius, Brad Wilson, John Caruso, Melinda Holley, Pete Gaughan, David Hood, Andrew York and myself; an impressive collection of power names.

As you would expect from such a list there is some serious hobby discussion. Topics discussed are The Runestone Poll (eligibility criteria, should non-diplomacy GMs be eligible for the GM Poll?, should the top 10% and bottom 10% of the votes be discarded from the Average Vote?), DipCon (should DipCon be a small diplomacy-only event or run in conjunction with a large wargaming con?, how well run were previous DipCons?, what can be done about declining attendance at DipCons?, should novices be allowed to dilute the player-strength of the con?, why hasn't AtlantCon had a DipCon?), Garret Schenck and **The Zine Register** feud, the current set-up of the American Hobby Awards (which articles should be nominated for The Rod Walker Award?, is the Melinda Holley Award a pointless award or a pointless award?, should people serving on the nominating committee be eligible for any of the Awards?, why hasn't Robert Sacks been nominated for The Miller Award?) and, given some of the names above, attacks on Bruce Linsey.

This is solid reading material for anyone interested in the Politics of the American hobby.

JOMP, JR # 7 (January 1992) contains so much interesting and thought provoking material that it's almost a crime. There's a history of Utopian literature and the struggle to create a Utopian society (has the fall of socialism discredited all utopia ?) in our midst (a world of science, the arcology on the Arizona desert).

There's a strong article on why psi is illogical and why psi as a science is an illusion. It seems to me that in his haste to prove that psi-research is 'unscientific' Richard Dengrove goes too far in condemning psi as being worthless. I remain unconvinced, whilst I do not believe in psi I've had personal experiences which I might use to argue its existence. The brain is a complex machine, and we still have little understanding of how it works. Pointing out parapsychology has been around for 140 years or so Richard comments:

"Yet, despite its age, you don't notice much communication via telepathy. When you want to communicate you use a phone — it's more reliable. You don't notice much construction via telekinesis. Hands, shovels and derricks are more useful than will. You don't notice much transportation by teleportation, do you? The train and plane is a lot more convenient. Conventional science has progressed by leaps and bounds yet parapsychology has hardly progressed at all. Some might say it hasn't progressed any."

The letter column has material on spiritualism, political correctness, the work ethic, job quotas and into multiculturalism. Much to get your teeth into and comment on. There's also the fascinating snippet that a Psychic bookshop in LA sells nonstick cauldrons: the mind boggles, it really does.

FTT 13 (*June 1992*) contains a long article, by Judith Haana, on the work of Transport 2000, a pressure group. Ever wondered how these organisations work, how they interact with government and with other pressure groups? This article shows how dull and unexciting these things work in the real world, although the article isn't dull and unexciting itself. This sub-culture is almost like a miniature fandom with its own network of publications, meetings, debates and personalities; all conducted on a personal level. Joseph Nicholas has an article which examines how, if any, the political institutions of the west have responded to the fall of their ideological counterparts in Eastern Europe. That is, have they noticed that the U.S.S.R is no longer the Empire it once was? Does the collapse of one ideology mean that liberal democratic capitalism has emerged as the final, supreme system for managing affairs? Is debate in the fact of this 'fact' meaningful?

FTT is a SF zine, I know this because it says so in the colophon. Still Steve Doubleday has rightly pointed out that the views of the editor(s), contributors and readers are of little significance. **Greatest Hits** doesn't run any games, neither does FTT, might FTT really be a diplomacy zine and might not the FTT readership be an untaped seam of proto diplomacy fans? Perhaps someone should mail them all a sample issue of **Springboard**...

These thoughts come to me whilst reading the editorial of **Folly 17** (*June 1992*) whose main thrust is that whilst there are many people out there pubbing their issue, only a very small number are pubbing SF zines. Should an attempt be made to blur the edges of fandom by persuading known amateur pubbers to move over into SF fandom, although why people who are quite happily pubbing else where would want to move over to SFdom isn't explained.

This process also works in reverse. It isn't all that hard to see the similarities between the better diplomacy zines (such as **Greatest Hits** and **Nertz**) and zines in SFdom and beyond. Mightn't these zines provide a source of proto diplomacy-fans? Arnie points out that almost every known fandom exhibits both a SerCon strain (which attracts new people to it) and a fannish strain (which is often the reason why they remain active after their initial interest has worn off). Can't these fannish fans be chipped away from the stone that moulded them and reworked into SF fans?

This issue of **Folly** also contains reasonable faan fiction about SilverCon, held in Las Vegas earlier in the year, as well as an extremely long convention report. An argument, by Las Vegas fan Su Williams, that fans are more creative and sensitive and that they possess a more liberal social and political philosophy than nonfans shows a high vision of Fandom that has yet to be tainted by reality. Flicking through it now I see a number of amusing anecdotes which I may be able to rework into a future ManorCon report and pass off as original...

Popular Curtlery # 7 (*July 1992*) is a source of material on the NSW Diplomacy Tournament which has relevance to the ongoing discussion on ManorCon.

"Satisfied that my position was safe, I agreed to ally with Danny and Frank to stop an 18 center win. After all, it was mostly my fault that Anthony had managed to get so big in the first place."

"Anthony made the proclamation that he would agree to a draw if we let him get to 17. Oh sure, Tony, sure."

"In the end, he managed to get to sixteen, and a secure position in the running for best Russia. With more time, he definitely would have gotten 18, as there was a weakness in my part of the line which Anthony failed to exploit." Adrian Appleyard, **Popular Cutlery #7** (*July 1992*).

I am convinced that diplomacy tournaments should be organised so that individual games are run as true to the spirit of the original rules as possible. This means that open-ended rounds (à la ManorCon) are the best approach to take, giving players a big incentive to go for the win. (Why risk annoying your ally by stabbing him, if you're not going to win the game... especially if you're playing in a tournament with three, or more, rounds and you could either end up playing against him again or playing against someone who heard what happened?)

“My only problem with the evening was the ‘debate’ towards the end of the night over whether there should be a ‘top board’ of the best seven players on the last day of the tournament. I am opposed to this, as it simply means that the whole weekend is geared towards one game. It also means that whatever happens, two or three of the top seven player **MUST** do well on the last day. There is no chance that they will all do well, and there is no chance that they will all do badly. As well as this, such a game is just a signal to new players that they are just there to fill positions in the first two days so that the top players can massage their egos. I have no objection if the top seven players have a separate game for a separate ‘Champions of Champions’ type of prize, but this closed ranks attitude is just causing the hobby to be more inbred and stagnant. I do not doubt that these ‘top seven’ games are a great experience for those players in them, and even a talking point for those not in them. But that still does not justify their existence, which is, in my mind, a step backwards for the tournament scene.” Adrian Appleyard, **Popular Cutlery** #7 (July 1992).

There has been a recent suggestion by Shaun Derrick in **Y Ddraig Goch** that there should be a ‘top board’ at ManorCon next year. I suggested the very same thing to Pete Sullivan prior to ManorCon, more to see what his response was then in an attempt to persuade him to adopt it.

There are two questions that have to be asked about a ‘Top Board’. Firstly are you just running a ‘Top Board’ without seeding the remaining boards (so that the players ranked 8th through 14th play on board two) and if you’re going to have a ‘Top Board’ on the final round shouldn’t you have one on every round?

Adrian is wrong to argue that a ‘Top Board’ means that any other games played in the last round are worthless. Surely an excellent result by a player just behind the leading 7 might catapult him over the ‘Top Board’ players and into first place? The ‘Top Board’ could easily end up as a low-supply center count high player count draw, the result on ‘board two’ might be a win. And if a player scores well, even wins, on the Top board doesn’t that show that they deserve to win the tournament?

There are problems with seeding diplomacy tournaments, it makes more work for the Tournament Organiser and means you need a more ‘formal’ approach to running games. I think that it should be tried at ManorCon to see what the response from the players is. Since ManorCon is a two-round event with the best result takes-all then it will be possible for almost anyone to win the tournament with a win in the second day.

With ManorCon being two-rounds there is a potential problem with seeding. It’s going to mean that the top board(s) are mostly likely going to contain the best ftf players, who have probably played against each other before and might not be happy at the prospect at playing against each other again.

Talkback (August 1992) is a stunning Mark Boyle production, who in eight slender¹⁰ pages manages to get digs in against Tony Benn, Harry Bond, **Electric Monk**, Nick Kinzett and a really nasty below the belt blow against RJW. The man has promise as a fan-writer, although he might not live long enough to gain critical acclaim. More people to put on Mark Boyle’s Enemies list, no wonder Iain doesn’t like him — his enemies list is beginning to rival Iain’s in size which might mean Iain losing his accolade of being #1 Fannish Fan!

¹⁰slander?

“Hello, Ricky-poops, it’s been four years since we last spoke. . . oh yes, I can even remember your last words, “Enclosed is the remainder of your sub, goodbye and good riddance!”, with a latter explanation to your readers that I was not the sort of person you wish to be associated with — quote, unquote. Indeed you felt so strongly, you refused to acknowledge a later apology and continued to vilify me in the hobby.” Mark Boyle in *Talkback* (August 1992).

Mark has, one can tell, forgiven Richard for his past acts and is willing to respond in a calm, reasonable manner to his letter. . . NOT! Remember the RJW cartoon I mentioned before? The put down from Tony Benn is most amusing, perhaps someone should try and recruit him as a letter-hack?

The debate on ZOTY goes on and on, paragraph after paragraph, page after page of tortured logic on how this Poll should be run. I’m not providing you with details, interesting as it may to watch this proto-feud develop it’s hardly relevant to a postal diplomacy newszine.

Postal diplomacy and postal mathematics are two different hobbies, although around the edges they blur into each other and it’s difficult to define a rigorous boundary separating the two. In this ill defined twilight zone zines, editors and readers diffuse back and forth from one hobby to t’other. Although we don’t hear much from the postal mathematics hobby, it would seem that we share some problems in common.

“Over the past year or two I, along with a few other people, have been remarking on the ‘recession’ that the hobby is undergoing. More precisely, the large number of folds compared to the number of new leagues/zines.” Dave Carter in *Scorpio* 51 (February 1992).

Is it coincidence that there should be a similar problems in both the postal diplomacy and postal mathematics hobby, or is just random chance?

This issue started of with the topic of Mark Boyle, we might as well end with the topic of Boyle who’s becoming ever more abrasive in his letter-column. Abrasive and entertaining, the Iain Bowen’s of this world will, no doubt, give me a long lecture about the evil Mr Boyle¹¹ but I always look forward to reading Mark’s little zinelets; and I can say that about previous few of the zines currently being produced in the hobby. Why, oh why, does he live the life of a hermit?

The Abyssinian Prince Jim Burgess, 100 Holden Street, Providence, RI 02908-5731. USA Available for the usual for non North-Americans.

DolchstoB Richard Sharp, Norton House, Whielden Street, Amersham, Bucks, HP7 0HU. 75 pence an issue. **Eggbert’s Zine & Talkback** Mark Boyle, 15 Linn Park Gardens, Johnstone, RENFREWSHIRE. PA5 8LH Available for ‘the usual’

Folly Arnie Katz, 330 S. Decatur, Suite 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107 USA. Available for ‘the usual’ and seemingly produced at a quite shocking monthly frequency.

FTT Judith Hanna & Joseph Nicholas, 5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill, LONDON. N15 6NH. Available for ‘the usual’, or £1 for a sample issue.

JOMP, JR Richard A. Dengrove, 2651 Arlington Drive, #302, Alexandria, VA. USA Available for ‘the usual’.

Maniac’s Paradise Doug Kent, 43 West Cherry St, #211, Rahway, NJ 07065. USA \$1.00 an issue.

Nertz, William Whyte, 107 Windmill Road, OXFORD. OX3 7BT. £4 for a years sub.

Popular Cutlery Adrian & Paul Appleyard, 254 Padstow Road, Eight Mile Plains, QLD 4113. AUSTRALIA \$3.00 an issue for non-Australians.

Scorpio, Dave Carter, 2 Crawford Village, Upholland, LANCASHIRE. WN8 9QP. 45 pence an issue (including postage).

Smodnoc, Toby Harris, 6 Durham Terrace, Silksworth, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear. SR3 1BW. 80 pence an issue (including first class postage)¹²

¹¹‘childish irritant’ was, I believe, the phrase used at a recent Yorkmeet

¹²and worth every penny. . . NOT!