

## BETWEEN LAW AND CHAOS...

**Note:** This interview was conducted between Marcus Bone & Charles Green in late 2008. It is presented here in conjunction with the free pdf release of Charles' **Chaos Cults of the Young Kingdoms** (also available on [www.stormbringerrpg.com](http://www.stormbringerrpg.com))

From the late 90s to the middle of this decade, little had been seen of the Stormbringer RPG. Sure, a D20 version come and gone, and Stormbringer 5<sup>th</sup> edition had finally been published, but for most of us the glory days of *Elric!* were now in the past. Little did we know, however, that in his corner of the United States, one Charles Green was quietly working away on two of the most interesting game products to be produced for the line - **Chaos Cults of the Young Kingdoms** and **Law Cults of the Young Kingdoms**.

In the following interview Stormbringer! takes the opportunity to talk to Charles about his interesting in the game, his time writing the Cults monographs and his leap to write for Mongoose.

**Hi Charles, thanks for taking the time to do this interview! I'm really looking forward to talking to you about not only your time working on Stormbringer, but also everything about our little hobby you find interesting.**

**Let's get the ball rolling, shall we. I suppose to break the ice we should talk about the one event all gamers have in common - how they got introduced to roleplaying.**

I got into roleplaying much later than most other people. It wasn't until late high school (my senior year, in fact) that I got introduced to this grand imaginative process. I was instantly hooked after my first session, and haven't stopped playing for any period of time longer than a few months since.

When I was in middle school, my family lived in a trailer part on the outskirts of Midland, TX. There were some other kids my age in the park, and I heard from one of them that they played a game where you could be anything you could imagine. I recall what he told me pretty clearly: "I play a minotaur, and last session, we went to hell and killed demons. I had a magic axe, and I hit the Devil, and did like a million points of damage in one blow." I asserted that this was, indeed, an act of awesome heroics, and celebrated with a high-five, even though I didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

It simply sounded cool, dripping with the sort of cool adolescent males find so intoxicating. I decided then that I simply had to get involved in the game.

Unfortunately, I wasn't nearly cool enough for this crowd (yes, not cool enough for a D&D group made up of 14 year olds-what does that say?), and my family moved around a lot, so I got bumped to another school in Fort Worth, Texas, where I mostly forgot about my buddy and his demon-slaying minotaur adventures. While there, I ran into a group of guys who talked about something called D&D, which sounded suspiciously like what the Minotaur Guy had talked about. I asked to be included, but, since I was so terminally uncool as to not have a car or a driver's license, the

invitation to the game never really came about.

After another move (like I said, we moved a lot), we wound up back in Midland, and I managed to find a group of people who played that thought I was cool enough. They told me the game was called Stormbringer, and that it was about people who fight demons. Or summon demons, I forget.

I asked if I could be a minotaur, which nearly got me booted.

Since then, I've played at least some part of every gaming related hobby I've been able to find. I had a serious Warhammer 40k problem for a while, which, due to intense outpatient treatment, is getting better, although I do still have a soft spot for skirmish-level mini games.

These days, most of my gaming time has been spent with my Xbox 360, largely because it: a) mostly works every time, so it beats out my laptop, and b) I can play for an hour without needing to locate a group of 3-5 people who have the time, imagination, and dice to do a table-top game.

Still, I try to GM a game at least twice a month, more if I can manage it. I'm the eternal GM, and almost never get a chance to play.

**Damn, I'd have loved to play a Minotaur in Stormbringer, especially one from Krynn! <jokes>**

**Obviously the game of Stormbringer must have rung a cord with you, as you ended you pretty much contributing the last 'official' material for Chaosium's line. Had you read any of Michael Moorcock's Elric short stories or novels back then?**

At the time I started playing Stormbringer, I had never heard of Moorcock or his works, and assumed that the game was a stand-alone thing. The person running the game, a buddy of mine named Koley, corrected this assumption, and directed me to a used book store, where I picked up all of the Elric stuff I could find.

At the time, we were playing Stormbringer 4th ed. We managed to keep the game going for something like 6 years after I joined the campaign, even though, by the end, it was only my Weeping Waste Barbarian, and my friend Ty's Pan Tang sorcerer who'd managed to get all the way through the game. We wrapped up the game one rainy day, years before Elric! was released. I even managed to get one of the other players, who had long since dropped out of the game, to dig up his thoroughly beaten, worn out copy of Stormbringer 4th out of the trunk of his car and give it to me. I still have it on my shelf; missing the cover and first 30 pages, and hastily re-bound with packing tape.

In many ways, this first long-term game I was how I have perceived the roleplaying hobby (and the Stormbringer game in particular) ever since. As I've gotten older, I think of those days of senseless, graphic violence and epic story lines as my halcyon days, not likely to be repeated (barring the acquisition of a seriously long-term group).

**That's what roleplaying is all about, those great memories and lasting friendships. One thing I noticed is that, about from passing references, you've said nothing about the Granddaddy of RPGs – D&D.**

I think I'm an anomaly in the American roleplaying scene, since I've never been part of a D&D game that has lasted more than a single session. So, I never really think of Stormbringer in

opposition to D&D. To me, Stormbringer is roleplaying.

**Is that is doesn't appeal or because you've never really played a long campaign?**

Honestly, I don't want to get into a D&D bashing session. I've played a few sessions, and tried to DM it from time to time. I can see the appeal, it just doesn't provide me, as a player, the sorts of experiences I look for in a game. I find the class system inadequate to create the vast majority of the characters I want to play, and starting off at 1st Level seems like playing the game before you have a decent character.

There's a line in Stormbringer 1st ed. Where St. Andre says something to effect that "Stormbringer PCs start out pretty powerful so you don't have to play for several months to have a PC worth playing." I like this ethos, as I'm more interested in having a group players hit the ground running and have the serious story start from the beginning of play.

Plus, as I've mentioned, I tend to move around a lot. It has been my experience than few players are able to consistently meet for a game more than a handful of sessions before the dreaded Real Life Demon manifests and starts eating playtime.

I'm a big proponent of "fun now" instead of "fun later," and Stormbringer delivers this in spades.

**Right, so Stormbringer is the game for you, which is great as you certainly have written some great stuff for it! How did that all come about? Writing for Chaosium that is...**

When I was just out of undergrad, my wife and I moved to Portland, Oregon, so that she could go to school to get a psychology degree. I had attempted to get into a Master's program to study English Literature, but didn't get in to any of the programs to which I had applied. And, as anyone who has been in grad school will attest to, money is always in short supply.

It became apparent that I needed a job, so, I took out the phone book and started calling places that I thought my B.A. In English would, at least in some small fashion, would allow me to work in. I managed to find a literary agent in Portland that just happened to be looking for an assistant. I think we were both surprised when we hit it off, and found out I was actually pretty good at the job.

Anyway, as part of the job, I got to attend the Book Expo in LA, which is a big convention for people in the publishing industry, of which I was a small and largely insignificant part. One day, I was thumbing through the book that listed all of the publishers that were attending, and saw that Chaosium had a booth. I managed to get away from my boss for a few minutes, and found the booth in the furthest reaches of the convention center.

There I met Charlie Krank, and I asked him how come they hadn't published anything for Elric! in such a long time (the last thing they had done was Sailing on the Seas of Fate, which had been at least 5 years prior, and the Bronze Grimoire, which was, I think, even before that). He said that they simply weren't getting the submission for anything related to Stormbringer, and that the Cults of Law and Chaos book was likely not going to happen, due to the then-author's Real Life Demon becoming unbound and wrecking havoc on his career as gaming author.

An idea formed in my head, and I said, "You know, I can write something for you," to which

Charlie replied, "Sure. Send us a proposal, and we'll see what we can do."

So, when I got back to Portland, I hammered out a proposal for the books that would eventually become *Gods of Chaos* and *Gods of Law*. The rest, as they say in the business, is history.

**That's a brave of you! Most of us talk big and never delivery. Obviously your proposal was accepted, was your work always going to be a monograph, or were you expecting something a little more impressive?**

Originally, I had contracted with Chaosium to do *Cults of the Young Kingdoms*. At the time, it was planned to be a fully illustrated, color-covered, perfect bound book, in line with the other books published for Stormbringer and Elric!. Part way through composition, I got an e-mail from Lynn Willis at Chaosium, who told me that Chaosium had decided to stop production on the Stormbringer line, but, since I had already done so much work on the book, they'd do it as something they were calling *monographs*. I decided to split the book into two smaller volumes, which eventually became the monographs for *Gods of Chaos* and *Gods of Law*, the later of which I did with some very welcome help from Richard Watts and Marcus Bone, as well as garnering illustration from Jeff Preston and Paul Baker. I wrote and submitted *Gods of Law* while I was finishing my Master's Thesis for my MFA, which is a feat that I will never again attempt.

**I don't blame you! By the way, if I'm not mistaken, you also wrote for Mongoose's *Elric of Melniboné*?**

After the Eternal Champion license was sold to Mongoose Publishing, I followed it and worked on *Bright Shadows of Melniboné*, and *Magic of the Young Kingdoms*, which I did with the assistance of Lawrence Whitaker and Pete Nash, who contributed material that was intended to be in the *Elric of Melniboné* core book, but had to be culled for space reasons.

**Wow, you've definitely been on the forefront of the writing in the recent past! Was it difficult to get your work published?**

Getting the books published is surprisingly straightforward: I pitched the books, wrote them, and handed in the finished manuscripts to the editor I was working with. The hardest part of writing a book is the actual writing, especially with Mongoose's notoriously short deadlines. I had a month and a half to do *Bright Shadows*, and got *Magic of the Young Kingdoms* done in just over 2 months, and I moved across the country in the middle of it.

**You certainly had your work cut for you there. This all begs the question, where do you get your ideas from, especially when you have such quick turn-arounds?**

The inspiration for the Gods books was a line in the beginning of the Stormbringer 5th ed. Book, which says, "Elric's plane is our own, many millions of years ago." I figured that, since this was the distant past of our world, many of the laws and outlooks on life would be similar to what we know in our modern age. The same stars would fill the sky (mostly), and the same sun and moon would rise and set to mark the passage of time. To take this idea further, I assumed that many of the belief systems and magical practices from our own history would have analogs in the Young Kingdoms. To that end, I took modern systems of thought and applied their precepts to the Young Kingdoms, suitably twisted to match the high-magic environment that this setting presents.

*Gods of Chaos* was largely inspired by small-scale sects of magicians, body modification groups,

and real world cults (the cultists of Hionhurn were based on the Thugee cult from India, for example). The cults of *Gods of Law* were inspired by one part modern astrology and one part ritual magic, specifically ceremonial magic that deals with the summoning and communion with angelic spirits. With *Bright Shadows*, I simply wanted to take Richard Watt's excellent *Stormbringer*-era sourcebook and expand it, and *Magic of the Young Kingdoms* was the grimoire I had always wanted to write for *Stormbringer* but didn't get a chance to before the line was sold.

**Boy, you must spend a bit of time thinking about Stormbringer! I suppose that logically leads on to me asking how often you actually get to write? Every day?**

**Moreover, I think the readers would be interested in hearing how you go about your writing routine – if you have one!**

I wish I could say that I write every day, but that isn't always true. I write as my only job, and since my spouse works so hard outside the house, I feel remiss if I don't put in a solid day's work. That said, I recognize that writing is an art, one that, for me, cannot be forced, and that if I'm not able to write in a day I do something else instead. I read a lot to fill the time, surf the Internet, and play a lot of games. I find that the downtime helps refill the subconscious, which is where most of sentence-level inspiration comes from. By allowing myself the chance to relax when my mind and body tell me I need it, I wind up being more relaxed about writing, and I get more done at the same time.

But, when I'm actually working on an assignment, my writing schedule is as follows: As early in the morning as I can manage, I start writing. I just let myself compose, trying not to self-edit too much at this stage. It doesn't matter if what I'm doing is crap, this is simply to get me going. In fact, if I'm stuck, I deliberately try to write something terrible, and let the "oh, come on, you can do better than that" impulse kick in, which is usually enough to get the juices flowing.

Once I hit roughly 500 words, I stop, even if I'm in the middle of a sentence. This usually takes me about 20 minutes, sometimes more. Then I go do something else; play a video game, have something to eat, start a load of laundry. Anything that gets me up and out of the chair and away from the computer works well enough. Once the clock has rolled around to the start of the next hour, I sit back down and start the process over again: another 500 words, and then a break.

I find that this has many advantages. Firstly, I tend to get bad carpal tunnel syndrome if I'm writing for too long, and this helps mitigate it; also, I get more done in a day. 500 words, even if they're terrible, is more than what most people write in a day, and if I can stack a few of these sessions together, I can get somewhere between 2000 and 3000 words done in a day. Once, when I was working on *Magic of the Young Kingdoms*, I managed a staggering 6000 words in a day all broken up by session of *Team Fortress 2*. Done this way, I manage to get a lot of writing done in a day, and my felt experience is that I spend most of the day playing video games.

Even though I think of myself as a creature of Chaos, I find that an ordered existence gives me the structure I need to actually do my work and get it out for people other than my wife to read.

**So, with such an extensive involvement with the game, in all its incarnations – first as a player and more recently as a writer - you must have a favourite book, adventure or supplement? I'll put you on the spot,**

**also, and ask why is a favourite?**

I have so many favorites that it's really hard to pin it down to just one. I get a lot of mileage out of *The Bronze Grimoire*, and used it extensively in the Gods books. I also really like the "Sphere and Runes" magic system from *The Unknown East*, and have used *Sea Kings of the Purple Towns* as the basis for more games than I can easily recall.

Out of the stuff I've actually been involved in, I think *Magic of the Young Kingdoms* comes in first, with *Gods of Law* a very close second. There are sections of *Magic* that I still can hardly believe came out of my head, and *Gods of Law* is something of a first (and as of yet unrepeated) book for *Stormbringer*; *Lawful Magic*. It was a fun book to write, and I learned a lot about astrology in the process.

**I see that *Magic of the Young Kingdoms* is available up on the Mongoose Publishing website. Do you have anything else planned?**

Not currently. I'm not opposed to working on new material though, so I might return to this setting at some point in the future. This setting was my very first, and has been the seat of my only long-term campaign. All of my roleplaying work, both professional and private, are owed in no small part to this setting and game line.

**A shame. While we are on the subject, however, what would you love to see produced for the game? Go on, let your imagination go wild!**

A big, full-color, rulebook that explores the Young Kingdoms in detail, with a stream-lined system designed specifically to evoke the danger, adventure, and weird mythos of the *Stormbringer* game. In addition to a really good adventure to illustrate what separates this setting from Generic Fantasy Game #327, I'd have a substantial "how to plan and GM a *Stormbringer* campaign" section.

Finally, I'd make sure that the characters created by the system are powerful, important figures in the setting, complete with artifacts, demon weapons, and have unholy powers from selling their soul to the Demon Lords.

Essentially, I'd have a cleaned up version of *Stormbringer* 1st ed. with modern production values, and not skimp on the setting detail. The Young Kingdoms are a fairly interesting place, which often gets overshadowed by the crazy, multi-planar nature of the *Eternal Champions* setting. This doesn't have to be the case; the people and places of the Young Kingdoms can be just as vibrant and as interesting as any of the other fantasy RPG settings that garner a great deal of support.

It's simply a matter of doing it.

**Well thanks for taking the time to have this chat with us here at Stormbringerrpg.com. It's great when you get to hear more about the games and products you have on your shelf and the people who help create them!**

**...before you go, however, one last question. As one of the more prolific writers in recent times is there anything you'd like to share with other prospective game writers?**

I wouldn't say I'm all that prolific; four books in a handful of years is hardly a drop in the bucket compared to some.

But I can address prospective writers. It is real easy to get wrapped up in the stuff related to writing that isn't writing. Market research isn't writing. Talking about your idea online isn't writing. Setting up a playtest group isn't writing. Writing is largely sitting in front of your computer or desk, alone, typing out words that it is possible no one else will ever see.

You cannot let this discourage you. If you are going to write something, keep writing. It doesn't matter if it is terrible (at least for a first draft). All that matters is this: keep writing! Games like this are largely kept alive by the enthusiasm of its fans, and those writers who want to keep it going. Nothing can kill a game faster than lack of supplements.

So, if you've got ideas for Stormbringer or Elric, get them down on paper, and make sure someone else sees them. If you want to get paid to do it, pitch it to Mongoose. Don't wait until the time is right, because the time is never right. Do it now.

Elric didn't brood for the whole of his Saga; his got his bone-white rear off the Ruby Throne, and changed the world by his actions. We may not be sorcerer-emperors, but we still possess that same ability to affect the world at large.