

## SUMMONING THE ETERNAL CHAMPION...

**Note:** This interview was conducted in July 2010, and is ©2010 *Marcus D. Bone* and *Lawrence Whitaker*. Special thanks to *Damon Warr* for reviewing this interview.

Lawrence Whitaker should be name familiar to all Stormbringer fans, as both the author of *Unknown East* and *Fate of Fools* for *ELRIC!* and latterly the *Elric of Melnibone* edition produced by Mongoose Publishing. Lawrence is a most prolific author for Mongoose Publishing, with credits for their Traveller, Runequest and Conan product lines and a history with Stormbringer that stretches back to contributions to the *Rogue Mistress* campaign.

With the imminent release of the updated *Runequest II* edition of *Elric of Melnibone* due shortly from Mongoose Publishing (August 2010), *Stormbringer!* thought it would be a good opportunity to talk with one of the few authors who been privy to so much of the history of our favourite game.

**Firstly, a quick thanks for taking the time out to answer these questions for us here at Stormbringer!, I understand that you're a busy man over at Mongoose. Can you enlighten us to what your role is there and what the best part of your job is?**

I'm a staff writer for Mongoose Publishing and have been for about 3 years. The best part? Being able to write for worlds and game settings that I've played in and cared about for the whole of my roleplaying career. Which spans about 30 years, I should admit.

**30 years! I refrain from saying anything! However, as you've stuck with this hobby for so long you must have an interesting story to tell about how you got into roleplaying games...**

I was probably 14 when I read an article in a Sunday supplement about games that didn't have boards, didn't have winners or losers and used funny sided dice and metal figures. I was hooked! As a fan of fantasy literature already these sounded like ideal games for the kind of books I liked to read. I tried making my own games with polystyrene ceiling tiles for dungeon floors and toy knights for figures, but it wasn't remotely close to a roleplaying game. A little later I came across a magazine called *Gamer* that had a feature on roleplaying and carried a small solo *Tunnel and Trolls* scenario running across various pages. This was the first time I got to create a character and then play something with more sophistication than the polystyrene tiles/toy knights effort I'd been experimenting with.

From there I graduated to *Basic Dungeons and Dragons* (purple box – still got it) and the scales fell from my eyes. This wasn't a way of gaming, it really was a way of creating stories with my friends at school, which we did every lunchtime and sometimes evenings for the next three years.

After exposure to *D&D* I got a copy of *Traveller* but that never worked quite so well for me. It just wasn't SF enough, I thought. I wanted blasters and X-Wing combats and instead got trade economics and career paths...

Then came *RuneQuest*. At the time there were only three games of real note: *D&D*, *Traveller* and *RQ*. I had some money for my birthday and had a choice; buy the *AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide*

or *RQ*, which had just been published under license by Games Workshop. It was obvious how that money needed spending. I bought the DM's Guide...

...and took it back for a refund two days later when it turned out that it wasn't bloody compatible with *Basic D&D*, wasn't a complete game, referred to several other books I didn't own, and was, to be honest, bollocks. The game shop gave me a credit note and I walked out with a copy of *RQ* instead. Beside it, on the shelf, was a copy of *Stormbringer 1st Edition*, but that game wasn't produced under license and cost twice as much as the boxed *RQ*. So *RQ*, and my introduction, to Glorantha, began.

I managed to get *Stormbringer* that Christmas, with more money from relatives. That was it. I pretty much abandoned *RQ* from that point (and had already abandoned *D&D* and *Traveller*) and concentrated on roleplaying in the Young Kingdoms.

**So does that mean you got into Stormbringer and Young Kingdoms via the game or Moorcock's stories?**

Stories first. I'm an avid reader and ever Saturday morning was a trip to the library with my dad for the week's books. Moorcock's works were in the SF section then, and the first of his books I read was *Sailor on the Seas of Fate* because I liked the title and the cover. I really enjoyed it and, the next week, got *The Vanishing Tower*. From then on it was a personal quest to hunt down and read every Moorcock book – especially Elric – that I could. I went through the Corum and Hawkmoon books in short order, but Elric was always the favourite. I probably read those books a good two years before even learning of D&D and roleplaying games.

**By the way, I hear you don't live in the UK, but rather in another, more interesting, part of the world?**

Obviously as a secret agent working on behalf of Her Majesty's Secret Service, there isn't a great deal I can tell you about my personal life save for trotting out my cover story: I live in Canada with my family, too many dogs, and like to drink red wine and Guinness (separately, not together). We have a massive great Grey Owl living in our woods and a garter snake underneath the decking. Chipmunks frolic in the woodpile. Life is good.

**It's great to hear that you have such a good life. Trust me, it reflects in the quality of your writing, and it leads me to ask, how did you get into writing for Roleplaying games?**

I wrote a couple of articles for White Dwarf which were, quite rightly, rejected – both on *Stormbringer*, I might add – but my first commission for Chaosium was for *Ringworld*. I loved the *Ringworld* game and sent them a short scenario I'd written. They, in return, sent me an immense folder of goodies which was preparation material for a *Ringworld* scenario to go in a planned campaign pack called *The City in the Jungle*. I wrote that first scenario in about a week, on a borrowed typewriter, and mailed it off. A year later I was still waiting to hear about when this book would be coming out. I received a nice letter from Sherman Khan at Chaosium explaining that the company no longer had the license to produce material based on *Ringworld* and he very kindly returned my original manuscript to me. I thought that would be the end of things.

About another year later I received a letter from Greg Stafford inviting me to contribute to a *Stormbringer* book which would later turn into *Rogue Mistress*. I leapt at the chance to work for Chaosium again and, having by this time invested in an Amstrad 8256 word processor, didn't even

need to borrow a typewriter from anyone. I wrote the scenario that became the *Ghosts in the Machine* chapter of that book in about a month; unfortunately, Greg rejected it believing it required too much work on the part of the GM to make it viable. Again, I thought my chance at superstardom in the gaming industry was dead. However, Greg handed the project over to Keith Herber who wrote to me again and said that he would be using my scenario after all. I did a quick rewrite for him and, within about 6 months, *Rogue Mistress* was published and there was my name, on the front cover, alongside people like Ken St Andre and Fred Behrendt. I was thrilled...

**Any particular reason you ended up writing exclusively for Chaosium?**

Quite simply Chaosium produced what I thought were the best games at the time. The BRP system was easy and intuitive and they had cornered the licenses for books I loved: Moorcock, Ringworld and there was talk of both Conan and Leiber. It seemed to me that Chaosium and I were destined to cross paths, and I'm still thrilled that we did. I'm good friends with both Charlie Krank and Greg Stafford and its all through that initial contact and writing for Chaosium made that happened.

**High praise, indeed. So what would be your favourite Chaosium product?**

The *ELRIC!* rules. Concise, atmospheric, and brilliantly presented. With the exception of *Ringworld* and 1st ed *Pendragon*, I don't think Chaosium released a graphically better game. That's a personal opinion of course, but I think *ELRIC!'s* elegance in one book is just wonderful. If I had to choose something other than a rule-set, and something I didn't have a hand in creating, I'd go for *Demon Magic*. It's not a brilliant book, really, but Larry Di'Tillio's mini-campaign in there gave me many sessions of terrific play.

**You obviously spent quite a long period writing as a freelancer for Chaosium, any memories you'd like to share?**

The best would have to be the preparation for the *Unknown East* book. I was working with Mark Morrison as my editor at that point and we exchanged faxes on a regular basis – me from my day job and him from home. That creative process, as I developed the *Unknown East* material and bounced it off both Mark and Richard Watts was an absolute joy.

The worst? I won't discuss it here. What I will say is this: Chaosium have been a good company in their relationship with me. They gave me interesting commissions, had a great deal of faith in my material, encouraged and supported me and have since become friends. The 'bad' parts of the relationship are now too trivial to really think about and, it must be remembered, are about business economics. I still love Chaosium to bits and always will. It's fabulous they've been around for so long when so many of their contemporaries have folded and become ancient history.

**Sounds like you had some fun back then, what do think is your favourite project during this time was?**

Oh, definitely the Ranyart Finn stories I wrote for *Herald of Doom* and various convention books. I think that was where I started to hone my craft and find my own voice and style of writing. You can't easily do that in a rulebook or scenario. I loved sitting down with a blank sheet of paper and letting a story flow through me, the plot and characters unfolding without any premeditation. I still write like that and my best work is always when I've put the least forethought into it or when my mind is fresh and I've no distractions.

Rulebook-wise, it's the *Unknown East*. It was my first 'proper' book and it still stands up well today. I was reading through the material in there as part of the process of incorporating it into the next Elric game for Mongoose and was very pleased with the quality of the writing. I'd do it all very differently now, of course, but at the time I wrote it, I think I did a very good job.

**Well, I'd have to say that *Unknown East* is definitely one of my favourite *ELRIC!* supplements, especially the information on the rune magic. While we are on the subject of books, I know you had big plans for a *Hawkmoon* setting that never saw the light of day until it became a monograph a few years back. It might be a contentious subject, but do you care to share anything of the history of trying to get this book published?**

It's not contentious – more laborious!

Following the publication of *The Unknown East*, Chaosium commissioned me to write a new version of the *Hawkmoon* game which would have been published in a similar style to *ELRIC!*. I spent about 6 months working on the manuscript, submitted it on time and waited... and waited...

Now, all this happened in conjunction with the *Magic: the Gathering* boom and Chaosium were in a position to contract for projects like this and were enjoying profitable times. However, submitting *Hawkmoon* coincided with the 'Bust' that followed Chaosium's foray into CCGs with *Mythos*. Suddenly rumours were all over the place that Chaosium was bankrupt and that was it: Goodnight Vienna. Well, things were bad, but not quite that bad, but *Hawkmoon* just languished. No one knew when it would be published, if ever, and it clearly wasn't a priority.

Now, a good friend of mine decided that there was a case for getting *Hawkmoon* published by someone else. God knows how he managed to broker it, but he managed to interest Dave Salisbury and Mandy Smith - the people who were eventually to produce *Dark Continent* – via another mutual friend. Things looked very hopeful and the intention was to fully license BRP from Chaosium and produce *Hawkmoon* as a standalone game. Things didn't get very far, unfortunately; Games Workshop had, at the time, exclusive rights to *Stormbringer* in the UK and this blocked Dave and Mandy's efforts to produce *Hawkmoon* under their own steam.

Now, simultaneously, Liam Routt was negotiating a similar kind of deal with Chaosium for producing *Corum* and *Hawkmoon*. So when Dave and Mandy's project fell-through, I transferred the manuscript over to Liam and we continued to work on it whilst *Corum* was being laid-out and produced. It looked very healthy for both games and the Eternal Champion line in general.

And then Wizards Attic happened...

Darcsyde was using WA as their distribution channel and when WA imploded, it had serious repercussions for Liam and the *Corum* book. With no distributor (and it was exceedingly difficult to find anyone who would touch either *Corum* or *Hawkmoon*), we eventually, after about four or five years, agreed to let things lie. I produced *Hawkmoon* as a monograph for Chaosium and it sold reasonably well, I believe, but that was more or less it until Mongoose bought the whole Eternal Champion license.

I am sad that my version of *Hawkmoon* didn't see print. It was hard work to write but enjoyable and, I think, as faithful a representation as I could make. But, it wasn't to be...!

**At least there's an official Mongoose edition now available. Talking of which, how did you get the position at Mongoose Publishing?**

Late in 2006 Mongoose advertised for a staff writer when Aaron Dembski Bowden moved to Norway to work on the Conan MMORPG. He was starting work on the new Elric game and I thought he's finished it. With Mongoose having the license to both **RQ**, Glorantha and the EC I figured this was as good a chance as any to be able to work on those games again. So I applied for the job. There was the usual interview sort of process but also the challenge of writing 20,000 words in a month to prove you could write a quality piece at pace. I produced a scenario for Glorantha and that, I think, clinched it. I was delighted when I was told I'd be taking over 'Elric' from Aaron, even though certain other things had kind of dulled my enthusiasm for the Eternal Champion. Three years later, I'm still with Mongoose and have just revised Elric for the **RQII** system.

**Trust me, you've definitely got a dream job there. Can I ask, what's your role at Mongoose Publishing, and what responsibilities do you have?**

I'm a staff writer and in charge of the **RuneQuest** line, developing it with Matthew Sprange. I'm also in charge of the creative elements of 'Living Glorantha'. Of course, I do end-up working on non-**RQ** projects as well. This year I'll be working on **Paranoia** and **Traveller** as well, but I'd say that 80% of my time is spent on RQ/Eternal Champion projects.

**Good to know that the line gets a dedicated author, especially one as verse in the setting as yourself. In regards to the Eternal Champion line, are you privy to the events surrounding the transfer of the license between Chaosium and Mongoose Publishing?**

Not really as it happened before I joined the company. However it's no secret that the EC license had become a millstone for Chaosium. They weren't doing anything with the property, there was bad-blood with Moorcock and the whole situation had degenerated into a mess. Charlie Krank told me that he'd be willing to part with the license for the right price, and Mongoose saw that opportunity. I'm glad that things worked out the way they did. Mongoose has been able to offer EC games the level of support Chaosium never could and, obviously, I now have a big hand in their production. I still find it remarkable, even now, that I got to pen not one, but two versions of an Elric game, and Glorantha material, and **RuneQuest**, all those years after scraping together money to buy the original games. Just think: if I hadn't returned that copy of the **AD&D Dungeon Masters' Guide**, I might not be doing this interview...

**Quite so. It's interesting to see where our choices in the past have led us... As you say, you've had a big hand in shaping Elric of Melniboné, I've got to ask, what was the process you went through to renew the line, and what were your key goals?**

To make the most accurate, complete and faithful Elric RPG yet. I worked very closely with Pete Nash, who's been my friend and writing partner for years, plus is a knowledgeable Moorcock fan. We went back to the novels and stories, distilled the core elements and atmosphere and worked the mechanics of the game to reflect the source material. I think we've been very successful in that regard. I know that quite a few **Stormbringer/ELRIC!** fans bemoan the lack of any bound demons in the game – and they sure were fun – but it was a Ken St Andre invention that never appeared in the books, and we wanted to be as truthful to the saga as we could.

I also want to see the games help people get back into Moorcock. I think its real shame that you don't see Mike's books as prominently as they used to be on bookstore shelves. Gaming can help raise interest in a writer – look at Call of Cthulhu and HP Lovecraft – and I'd like people to pick up Elric, or play it, and then want to go and buy the books. I have a roleplaying group here in Canada who are embarking on an Elric campaign with me and I know that what they're playing has sparked an interest in the source material. That, for me, is fabulous to witness.

**I suppose that's the ultimate goal with all creative projects – see them being used in the matter intended. I also know you were involved in some of the Hawkmoon core book, how much of your monograph was used as the basis for this?**

Very little. Gareth Hanrahan did have the monograph and there are a few bits of it here and there in the RQ Hawkmoon book, but not very much. And I think that was the right way to do things. Gareth did a terrific job with Hawkmoon and he needed to write his take on it, just as I'd written mine. I did write the 'Castle Brass' book for Hawkmoon and some of the monograph elements found their way into that book, so all that work from the 1990s is still getting used!

**And now I see with *Runequest II* having been successfully launched there is a new edition of *Elric of Melniboné* on the way, with your name on it of course. Care to share any details with us?**

Very happy to. The future's looking good. Elric has been revised for RQII and I've just completed a revision of *Cults of the Young Kingdoms* which includes about half a dozen new cults focusing on obscure Lords of Law and Chaos (they're in the saga – you just have to hunt for them!). In a couple of months I'll be starting work on *Cities of the Young Kingdoms* which will see, at the very least, Raschil being fully developed, as that's my signature city from my own Elric campaigns. The book will probably detail three or four cities and I'll be stringing a campaign arc throughout all the descriptions, so it will be a combination of setting book, GM resource and EoM campaign. Next year I'm intending to have the chance to produce a full, massive EoM campaign comparable in scale to something like *Dara Happa Stirs* or the old Ken Rolston Stormbringer scenarios.

**Now that is something to look forward to, I always thought that *Stormbringer* needed more campaigns. What about the other Eternal Champion lines? Please tell us you can share a little of what awaits fans in the future.**

There's a lot to share and I'm very happy to talk about it. Next year we'll produce *Corum*. Chances are *Hawkmoon* will be revamped too, and whilst I might take the opportunity to work-in some more of the old monograph, I won't change anything Gareth's developed, background wise, because he did such a good job. I'll simply add to it. I'm saying 'I' but there's every chance that Pete Nash will produce one or both of those books. Both Pete and I are the two permanent staff writers, so it's logical to say that those projects will fall that way, but things are always changing so it might be me for both, Pete for both, or someone completely different!

The intention is to also deal with other aspects of the Eternal Champion – Erekoose, von Bek, Bastable, Cornelius and so on. Not sure how this will work; some of those names lend themselves to fully-fledged sourcebooks better than others. But they will receive attention in some shape or form, and I will have a major hand in their shape and direction.

I'd personally love to do something based on *Gloriana*. It's my favourite Moorcock book (barring Elric, obviously), but I doubt that that will see light of day for quite a while yet.

**Good to hear the entirety Michael Moorcock's multiverse will be covered...**

I'd really like to see the top four Eternal Champions – Elric, Corum, Hawkmoon and Ereko – with their own core supplement, a setting book and a campaign. I'd then like to tie all of them together with a Multiverse book that brings in all the peripheral champions and allows for a truly Multiversal campaign to evolve. I also want to see others producing cults, scenarios and so on for use with all the EC games and publishing them in 'Signs and Portents'. I can't focus all my attention on Elric and his cronies, however much I'd like to, and to see others gain the kind of enthusiasm I, and readers of this website, have for Mike Moorcock's work, through gaming, would be terrific.

**Well, I think that covers everything. Whew! Thanks for taking the time to answer all of our questions and I know all of us at Stormbringer! and Eternal Champion fans everywhere look forward to what the future brings. Any final words?**

I think I'd really like to thank all the people who've read, gamed with, and enjoyed my work over the past 20 years. I've had some wonderful feedback, met some wonderful people at conventions, and, ultimately, it's the fans and gamers who make what I do worthwhile. There have been ups and downs, but it's been mostly ups, and I'm now looking forward to a long and bright future for Elric and the whole EC license through Mongoose. I also want to thank Michael Moorcock for creating worlds, characters and works that have fuelled my imagination for 30 years or so, and still continue to do so. Mike's a great and generous writer and I wouldn't be doing what I am doing without him.

Finally, thank you to you, Marcus, for letting me waffle on like this!