

PREFACE

By Michael Moorcock

Thanks to Philippe Druillet and Maxim Jakubowski, who began a BD of Elric in a short-lived magazine called *Moi Aussi* in the early sixties, and introduced Elric to a French audience, Elric has been appearing in France almost as long as he has in the UK, giving me a special affection for my French readers. Indeed, I have always been extremely well-served by French publishers, editors, translators, designers and illustrators. They have understood the peculiar atmosphere and ambiguities surrounding a romantic character whose adventures represent for me a kind of psychic autobiography.

I began publishing Elric's adventures in 1961. The first story was commissioned by E.J.Carnell, editor of *Science Fantasy* magazine during a conversation in a pub. At the time I thought I was writing one story which would be a kind of homage to the fantasy I had enjoyed as a teenager. I had no plans to write more. That story was *The Dreaming City*. It was surprisingly popular and established the fundamentals of the rest of the series. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Carnell's readers four more novelettes and a novel were all published in *Science Fantasy*.

After Elric appeared, readers began to demand other heroic fantasy stories from me. *The Eternal Champion*, which established the idea of the recurring hero, was also written for *Science Fantasy* magazine, although I had published an early version in a short-lived fanzine in the 1950s. *The Sundered Worlds*, which established the idea of the multiverse and predicted, among other things, black holes and macro-computers, was another story commissioned by Carnell and published in the same two year period, in the companion magazine *Science Fiction Adventures*, which published Ballard's *The Drowned World* around the same time and specialised in stories rather more literary than the title suggested. By the age of 23 I had already laid the ground for almost every other fantastic story I was to write in the next forty years. I must say, however, that I never planned to write so many.

The third Carnell magazine to publish myself and Ballard regularly was *New Worlds*. Ballard and I met as a result of our mutual ambitions, expressed in guest editorials in *New Worlds*. In 1964, when Carnell named me as his successor, I was 24 and ready with the editorial policy which would eventually be christened, not by us, 'the New Wave'.

Because I was supporting a magazine whose budget was not sufficient to permit my ambitions, I agreed to write more and more fantasy stories. Most literary movements have a way of rejecting and embracing the past at the same time and the sf New Wave did exactly that. We wrote and published experimental stories for *New Worlds*, breaking fresh ground almost with every issue, but heroic fantasies, with their roots in Peninsula Romance and the 19th century Gothic, sustained those experiments. Demanded by publishers in an increasing number of countries, Hawkmoon, Corum, Erekoze, von Bek and others all followed. The stories began to connect naturally, without any grand initial plan, just as, I suspect, the stories of Balzac or Zola began to connect, until a pattern became visible to the writer. Characters who had relatively minor roles in one book would become central to another book. I was 21 when they began to appear, though I had conceived the character and some of the story rather earlier, during my teens.

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For all their fantastic nature, it is my characters rather than their worlds or stories which remain strongest in my own memory. I began writing consciously in the romantic tradition of Shelley, Byron and Maturin. Frankenstein, Don Juan and Melmoth the Wanderer were my models. I was convinced that these writers and others were essentially describing what was known as 'the haunted palace of the mind'. Mervyn Peake, therefore, with his grand conception of Gormenghast, was my hero and remains so to this day. Indeed, as I wrote a series of articles for *Science Fantasy* on the roots of modern fantasy, I also described the nature of my own characters. Unlike those of Tolkien and his followers, my landscapes are not examples of what today is called 'world building'. Just as it does in *Wuthering Heights*, my scenery reflects the mental states of my characters. I did not develop elaborate maps, because my landscapes were the maps of the characters' interior worlds. I had no interest in

concocting complicated glossaries and languages for my various worlds, because the lexicon I was using was one of images, which in turn reflected internal conflict, what we used to call 'The Alphabets of Unreason'. My grand palaces and cities had no limitations because the architecture of the unconscious has no limitations. My invented languages are more familiar to psychologists than they are to etymologists. Like Poe and others, I was interested in words and names whose resonances echoed states of mind rather than the grammars of ancient races.

That could be why I am flattered but always a little mystified by the way in which my work has been co-opted into the world of *Dungeons and Dragons* and other games. I have no answer to a reader or gamer wanting to discuss the chief national product of Oin or Yu or how many miles lie between Shazar and Jharkor across the Marshes of the Mist. The Marshes of the Mist certainly contain undiscovered aspects of Young Kingdoms geography but they are primarily undiscovered aspects of my own and my protagonist's psyches. They are therefore infinite. Perhaps they will only become finite when I die. My fantasy fiction is in this respect no different to my 'realistic' fiction, such as *Mother London* or *Byzantium Endures* (*Byzance 1917*). I use it to explore my own memory, my own character, as well as to make a moral examination of the objective world and its workings. That is why so much of it is set on the borderlands between reality and nightmare. If the 20th century, which gave us amongst so many examples, Flanders, Auschwitz and Rwanda, taught us nothing else, it taught us how little distinction there is between the two.

I am, of course, flattered that Elric's character and adventures have entered the common gaming lexicon, just as I am pleased at his frequent appearance in other guises, in comics and in anim . I must admit that I prefer to be *asked* if people wish to write about the character and these days Elric is not quite as free as he began, since a major studio bought the rights to his adventures and have a characteristically corporate attitude to what they regard as their 'intellectual property'. For many years I resisted the inducements of corporate entertainment to co-opt Elric. Now, as I write, there is a possibility that a major producer plans a film faithful to my original intentions. I am lucky in having readers in the film business who understand Elric's nature very well and I am assured they will not take too literal an approach, which was what I had feared in other directors and producers who in the past attempted to purchase the rights. I have already expressed the hope that, if they do not choose to direct the movie themselves, they will give the job to a French director, not merely because of my admiration for so many French films from the classic silents to the present, but because I believe a French director will bring the appropriate sensibility to my character, just as so many French writers have understood him, often, perhaps, better than the majority of those English and American writers who have already recorded his apocryphal adventures. Indeed, I still harbour a strong desire that one or more of my stories will be filmed entirely in France. Meanwhile, with Fabrice Colin (see his "Eulogy for the Abyss-Fish" in this volume), I am now writing Elric stories which *originate* in France! The first of these novels is *Les buveurs d'ames*.

I hope this helps go towards explaining why I have, for instance, been happy to see Jerry Cornelius appear in so many forms, by so many hands, from Mal Dean to Mike Harrison, from M bius to Norman Spinrad, and have never sought to control those interpretations, just as I have never laid down the law as to his appearance nor controlled the manifestations of Elric (though personally I have clear ideas of what he looks like). New authors offer fresh revelations, new aspects of a character which can often surprise me. What's more, who could not be fascinated by seeing their reflection in so many different mirrors? My self-image as a writer is that of someone in constant public dialogue with his readers around the world (see my website www.multiverse.com/). That vision is exemplified and amplified by this kind of experiment. All my working life I have enjoyed that dialogue, frequently responding to reader requests to write about certain characters or events, ideas suggested by those who have seen an aspect of my stories which I might have missed. Of course I have all the usual egocentric traits of a self-obsessed creative person and have insisted, sometimes against considerable resistance, in making my own path. I am obsessive, arrogant in moulding other peoples' tools and ideas to my own uses, sometimes disappointed by the way my own tools are used to

crude or unoriginal effect. I refuse the dictates of publishers and will not write more stories merely because I am offered large sums of money or because the majority of readers demand them. I will only write what I believe furthers my own literary ambitions and offers the reader something fresh. There is always a temptation to write the same story over and over again, and indeed this is probably the best way to become a very rich writer, but precisely because I hate the thought of becoming repetitive and creatively infertile, I love to open my creations to fresh interpretation.

With the completion of my most recent Elric trilogy, which began with *The Dreamthief's Daughter* and continued through *The Skrayling Tree* and *The White Wolf's Son*, I have retired from writing heroic fantasy novels in English, at least in the conventional form of the romance. I have done some work in describing Elric's youth and education in a BD done in collaboration with Walter Simonson, called *Elric: The Education of a Sorcerer*, and a new series of comics by other hands are already appearing in English (*The Balance Lost* by Chris Roberson, Boom Comics 2011/12) one in French whose title I don't yet know. I am taking an active interest in a film, which will probably combine the novel *Elric of Melniboné* with the short story *The Dreaming City*, and can hope that if this film finds favour with the public, there will be two more, bringing Elric's story to the conclusion described in *Stormbringer*.

It is possible that I will continue writing novellas detailing the 'missing' years of Elric's life ; but I have decided to stop writing heroic fantasy novels for a number of reasons. I am more interested in the experimental narratives of such books as *Blood* and *The War Amongst the Angels or The Whispering Swarm* – which offer readers a less familiar fantasy. They work, as my original stories did, against established literary and generic conventions. The irony of writing for as long as I have been writing is that the experiments of one's youth become the conventions of one's old age and involve me in subverting these new conventions as I subverted the earlier ones! Moreover, I honestly believe I can add little more to a form which I helped create. There are also many good, newer writers, as this anthology proves, who can expand the form and make it do fresh things, attack different problems, offer more spectacular dreams. When I began writing Elric it was in very much the same spirit that I began performing rock and roll – precisely because it was a new, fresh, unmapped territory, where you could learn by selling your mistakes, where you could begin something never quite knowing how it was going to turn out and be pleasantly surprised by the result. This characterised the age we call the Sixties. Today, it is impossible to write or perform what we started then without a sense of repetition. There is now a vast canon, a context within which you are creating. It does not mean that the creations are any better or worse, but they are conceived and brought to completion in a very different atmosphere. People like Ballard, Spinrad, Disch, Aldiss, Zelazny and others were attracted to fantasy and science fiction precisely because there was no established body of criticism, no magazines devoted to its discussion, no academic theses. Nowadays, comics and games and other literary and musical expressions offer that same sense of venturing into uncharted territory. This is not to say that there is no uncharted territory left, but when I began it was almost entirely *terra incognita*. *New Worlds* first manifestation as a fanzine before World War Two was actually *Novae Terrae*. You set off on those unknown seas, much as the Vikings set off, hoping that your ship was sturdy enough and your compass not too crude for the job. Certainly in rock and roll there was a very good chance you might not come back alive and to some of us around *New Worlds*, experimenting with drugs and lifestyles, there was a very similar risk.

As the frontiers shrink, of course, you become dangerously close to turning into one of those old farts who wag their fingers at the young and say how much more glamorous life was in their day. Clearly, it is in the nature of glamour to take on different forms, find different voyages, different kinds of ship, different destinations and navigational aids. It is in that spirit, I hope, that I offer Elric to younger writers, just as I gave Jerry Cornelius to others so many years ago, in the hope they will take him on new explorations. I am delighted by their novelty, intrigued by the aspects of Elric's character and world they reveal, applaud their courage and remain, as always, flattered by their interest.

And, as hardly needs to be said, I am delighted if this Francophone experiment strengthens my already strong and affectionate bonds with France (where I now spend much

of my life), French literature, French writers and, above all, my French readers to whom I express, as always, my best wishes and thanks.

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