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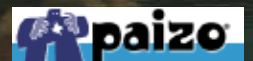
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One Life, Furnished in Early Moorcock

by Neil Gaiman

The Pale albino prince lofted on high his great black sword "This is Stormbringer" he said "and it will suck your soul right out."

The Princess sighed. "Very well!" she said. "If that is what you need to get the energy you need to fight the Dragon Warriors, then you must kill me and let your broad sword feed on my soul."

"I do not want to do this" he said to her.

"That's okay" said the princess and with that she ripped her flimsy gown and beared her chest to him. "That is my heart" she said, pointing with her finger. "and that is where you must plunge."

He had never got any further than that. That had been the day he had been told he was being moved up a year, and there hadn't been much point after that. He'd learned not to try and continue stories from one year to another. Now, he was twelve.

It was a pity, though.

The essay title had been *Meeting My Favourite Literary Character*, and he'd picked Elric. He'd toyed with Corum, or Jerry Cornelius, or even Conan The Barbarian, but Elric of Melnibone won, hands down, just like he always did.

Richard had first read *Stormbringer* three years ago, at the age of nine. He'd saved up for a copy of *The Singing Citadel* (something of a cheat, he decided, on finishing: only one Elric story), and then borrowed the money from his father to buy *The Sleeping Sorceress*, found in a spin-rack while they were on holiday in Scotland last summer. In *The Sleeping Sorceress* Elric met Erikose and Corum, two other aspects of the Eternal Champion, and they all got together.

Which meant, he realised, when he finished the book, that the Corum books and the Erikose books, and even the Dorian Hawkmoon books were really Elric books too, so he began buying them, and he enjoyed them.

They weren't as good as Elric, though. Elric was the best.

Sometimes he'd sit and draw Elric, trying to get him right. None of the paintings of Elric on the covers of the books looked like the Elric that lived in his head. He drew the Elrics with a fountain pen in empty school exercise books he had obtained by deceit. On the front cover he'd write his name: *Richard Grey, Do not Steal.*

Sometimes he thought he ought to go back and finish writing his Elric story. Maybe he could even sell it to a magazine. But then, what if Moorcock found out? What if he got into trouble?

The classroom was large, filled with wooden desks. Each desk was carved and scored and ink-stained by its occupant, an important process. There was a blackboard on the wall, with a chalk-drawing on it: a fairly accurate representation of a male penis, heading towards a Y shape, intended to represent the female genitalia.

The door downstairs banged, and someone ran up the stairs. "Grey, you spazmo, what're you doing up here? We're meant to be down on the Lower Acre. You're playing football today."

"We are? I am?"

"It was announced at assembly this morning. And the list is up on the games notice board." J.B.C. MacBride was sandy-haired, bespectacled, only marginally more organised than Richard Grey. There were two J. MacBrides, which was how he ranked a full set of initials.

"Oh."

Grey picked up a book (*Tarzan at the Earth's Core*) and headed off after him. The clouds were dark grey, promising rain or snow.

People were forever announcing things he didn't notice. He would arrive in empty classes, miss organised games, arrive at school on days when everyone else had gone home. Sometimes he felt as if he lived in a different world to everyone else.

He went off to play football, *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* shoved down the back of his scratchy blue football shorts.

...

He hated the showers and the baths. He couldn't understand why they had to use both, but that was just the way it was.

He was freezing, and no good at games. It was beginning to become a matter of perverse pride with him that in his years at the school so far, he hadn't scored a goal, or hit a run, or bowled anyone out, or done anything much except be the last person to be picked when choosing sides.

Elric, proud pale prince of the Melniboneans, would never have had to stand around on a football pitch in the middle of winter, wishing the game would be over.

Steam from the shower room, and his inner thighs were chapped and red. The boys stood naked and shivering in a line, waiting to get under the showers, and then to get into the baths.

Mr Murchison, eyes wild and face leathery and wrinkled, old and almost bald, stood in the changing rooms directing naked boys into the shower, then out of the shower and into the baths. "You boy. Silly little boy. Jamieson. Into the shower, Jamieson. Atkinson, you baby, get under it properly. Smiggins, into the bath, Goring, take his place in the shower..."

The showers were too hot. The baths were freezing cold and muddy.

When Mr Murchison wasn't around boys would flick each other with towels, joke about each others' penises, about who had pubic hair, who didn't.

"Don't be an idiot," hissed someone near Richard. "What if the Murch comes back. He'll kill you!" There was some nervous giggling.

Richard turned and looked. An older boy had an erection, was rubbing his hand up and down it, slowly, under the shower, displaying it proudly to the room.

Richard turned away.

...

Forgery was too easy.

Richard could do a passable imitation of the Murch's signature, for example, and an excellent version of his housemaster's handwriting and signature. His housemaster was a tall, bald, dry man, named Trellis. They had disliked each other for years.

Richard used the signatures to get blank exercise books from the stationary office, which dispensed paper, pencils, pens, and rulers on the production of a note signed by a teacher.

Richard wrote stories and poems and drew pictures in the exercise books.

...

After the bath Richard towelled himself off, and dressed hurriedly; he had a book to get back to, a lost world to return to.

He walked out of the building slowly, tie askew, shirt-tail flapping, reading about Lord Greystoke, wondering whether there really was a world inside the world where dinosaurs flew and it was never night.

The daylight was beginning to go, but there were still a number of boys outside the school, playing with tennis balls: a couple played conkers by the bench. Richard leaned against the red-brick wall and read, the outside world closed off, the indignities of changing rooms forgotten.

"You're a disgrace, Grey."

Me?

"Look at you. Your tie's all crooked. You're a disgrace to the school. That's what you are."

The boy's name was Lindfield, two school years above him, but already as big as an adult. "Look at your tie. I mean, *look* at it." Lindfield pulled at Richard's green tie, pulled it tight, into a hard little knot. "Pathetic."

Lindfield and his friends wandered off.

Elric of Melnibone was standing by the red-brick walls of the school building, staring at him. Richard pulled at the knot in his tie, trying to loosen it. It was cutting into his throat.

His hands fumbled around his neck.

He couldn't breathe; but he was not concerned about breathing. He was worried about standing. Richard had suddenly forgotten how to stand. It was a relief to discover how soft the brick path he was standing on had become, as it slowly came up to embrace him.

They were standing together under a night sky hung with a thousand huge stars, by the ruins of what might once have been an ancient temple.

Elric's ruby eyes stared down at him. They looked, Richard thought, like the eyes of a particularly vicious white rabbit that Richard had once had, before it gnawed through the wire of the cage, and fled into the Sussex countryside to terrify innocent foxes. His skin was perfectly white; his armour, ornate and elegant, traced with intricate patterns, perfectly black. His fine white hair blew about his shoulders, as if in a breeze, but the air was still.

--*So you want to be a companion to heroes?* he asked. His voice was gentler than Richard had imagined it would be.

Richard nodded.

Elric put one long finger beneath Richard's chin, lifted his face up. Blood-eyes, thought Richard. Blood-eyes.

--*You're no companion, boy,* he said, in the High Speech of Melnibone.

Richard had always known he would understand the High Speech when he heard it, even if his Latin and French had always been weak.

--*Well, what **am** I, then?* he asked. *Please tell me. Please?*

Elric made no response. He walked away from Richard, into the ruined temple.

Richard ran after him.

Inside the temple, Richard found a life waiting for him, all ready to be worn and lived, and inside that life, another. Each life he tried on, he slipped into, and it pulled him further in, further away from the world he came from; one by one, existence following existence, rivers of dreams and fields of stars, a hawk with a sparrow clutched in its talons flies low above the grass, and here are tiny intricate people waiting for him to fill their heads with life, and thousands of years pass and he is engaged in strange work of great importance and sharp beauty, and he is loved, and he is honoured, and then a pull, a sharp tug and it's...

...it was like coming up from the bottom of the deep end of a swimming pool. Stars appeared above him and dropped away and dissolved into blues and greens, and it was with a deep sense of disappointment that he became Richard Grey, and came to himself once more, filled with an unfamiliar emotion. The emotion was a specific one, so specific that he was surprised, later, to realise that it did not have its own name: a feeling of disgust and regret at having to return to something he had thought long since done with and abandoned and forgotten and dead.

Richard was lying on the ground, and Lindfield was pulling at the tiny knot of his tie. There were other boys around, faces staring down at him, worried, concerned, scared.

Lindfield pulled the tie loose. Richard struggled to pull air, he gulped it, clawed it into his lungs.

“We thought you were faking. You just went over.” Someone said that.

“Shut up,” said Lindfield. “Are you all right? I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. Christ. I’m sorry.”

For one moment, Richard thought he was apologising for having called him back from the world beyond the Temple.

Lindfield was terrified, solicitous, desperately worried. He had obviously never almost killed anyone before. As he walked Richard up the stone steps to the Matron’s office, Lindfield explained that he had returned from the school tuck-shop, found Richard unconscious on the path, surrounded by curious boys, and had realised what was wrong. Richard rested for a little in the matron’s office, where he was given a bitter soluble aspirin, from a huge jar, in a plastic tumbler of water, then was shown in to the Headmaster’s study.

“God! but you look scruffy, Grey,” said the Headmaster, puffing irritably on his pipe. “I don’t blame young Lindfield at all. Anyway, he saved your life. I don’t want to hear another word about it.”

“I’m sorry,” said Grey.

“That will be all,” said the Headmaster, in his cloud of scented smoke.

...

“Have you picked a religion, yet?” asked the school chaplain, Mr Aliquid.

Richard shook his head. “I’ve got quite a few to choose from,” he admitted.

The school chaplain was also Richard’s biology teacher. He had once taken Richard’s biology class, fifteen thirteen-year-old boys and Richard, just twelve, across the road, to his little house opposite the school. In the garden Mr Aliquid had killed, skinned and dismembered a rabbit, with a small, sharp knife. Then he’d taken a footpump and blown up the rabbit’s bladder like a balloon, until it had popped, spattering the boys with blood. Richard threw up, but he was the only one who did.

“Hm,” said the chaplain.

The chaplain’s study was lined with books. It was one of the few masters’ studies that was in any way comfortable.

“What about masturbation. Are you masturbating excessively?” Mr Aliquid’s eyes gleamed.

“What’s excessively?”

“Oh. More than three or four times a day, I suppose.”

“No,” said Richard. “Not excessively.”

He was a year younger than anyone else in his class; people forgot about that sometimes.

...

Every weekend he travelled to North London to stay with his cousins, for barmitzvah lessons taught by a thin, ascetic cantor, *frummer* than *frum*, a cabbalist and keeper of hidden mysteries onto which he could be diverted with a well-placed question. Richard was an expert at well-placed questions.

Frum was orthodox, hardline Jewish. No milk with meat, and two washing machines for the two sets of plates and cutlery.

Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother’s milk.

Richard’s cousins in North London were *frum*, although the boys would secretly buy cheeseburgers after school and brag about it to each other.

Richard suspected his body was hopelessly polluted already. He drew the line at eating rabbit, though. He had eaten rabbit, and disliked it, for years before he figured out what it was. Every Thursday there was what he believed to be a rather unpleasant chicken stew for school lunch. One Thursday he found a rabbit’s paw floating in his stew, and the penny dropped. After that on Thursdays he filled up on bread and butter.

On the underground train to North London he’d scan the faces of the other passengers, wondering if any of them were Michael Moorcock.

If he met Moorcock he’d ask him how to get back to the ruined temple.

If he met Moorcock he’d be too embarrassed to speak.

...

Some nights, when his parents were out, he’d try to phone Michael Moorcock.

He’d phone directory enquiries, and ask for Moorcock’s number.

“Can’t give it to you, love. It’s ex-directory.”

He'd wheedle and cajole, and always fail, to his relief. He didn't know what he would say to Moorcock if he succeeded.

...

He put ticks in the front of his Moorcock novels, on the By The Same Author page, for the books he read.

That year there seemed to be a new Moorcock book every week. He'd pick them up at Victoria station, on the way to barmitzvah lessons.

There were a few he simply couldn't find -- *Stealer of Souls*, *Breakfast in the Ruins*, -- and eventually, nervously, he ordered them from the address in the back of the books. He got his father to write him a cheque.

When the books arrived they contained a bill for 25 pence: the prices of the books were higher than originally listed. But still, he now had a copy of *Stealer of Souls*, and a copy of *Breakfast in the Ruins*.

At the back of *Breakfast in the Ruins* was a biography of Moorcock that said he'd died of lung cancer the year before.

Richard was upset for weeks. That meant there wouldn't be any more books, ever.

...

"That fucking biography. Shortly after it came out I was at a Hawkwind gig, stoned out of my brain, and these people kept coming up to me, and I thought I was dead. They kept saying 'You're dead, you're dead.' Later I realised that they were saying, 'But we thought you were dead'."

Michael Moorcock, in conversation. Notting Hill, 1976

...

There was the Eternal Champion, and then there was the Companion to Champions. Moon-glum was Elric's companion, always cheerful, the perfect foil to the pale prince, who was prey to moods and depressions.

There was a multiverse out there, glittering and magic. There were the agents of balance, the Gods of Chaos, and the Lords of Order. There were the older races, tall, pale and elfin, and the young kingdoms, filled with people like him. Stupid, boring, normal people.

Sometimes he hoped that Elric could find peace, away from the black sword. But it didn't work that way. There had to be the both of them -- the white prince and the black sword.

Once the sword was unsheathed it lusted for blood, needed to be plunged into quivering flesh. Then it would drain the soul from the victim, feed his or her energy into Elric's feeble frame.

Richard was becoming obsessed with sex; he had even had a dream in which he was having sex with a girl. Just before waking he dreamed what it must be like to have an orgasm -- it was an intense and magical feeling of love, centred on your heart; that was what it was, in his dream.

A feeling of deep, transcendent, spiritual bliss.

Nothing he experienced ever matched up to that dream.

Nothing even came close.

...

The Karl Glogauer in *Behold the Man* was not the Karl Glogauer of *Breakfast in the Ruins*, Richard decided; still, it gave him an odd, blasphemous pride to read *Breakfast in the Ruins* in the school chapel, in the choir stalls. As long as he was discreet no-one seemed to care.

He was the boy with the book. Always and forever.

His head swam with religions: the weekend was now given to the intricate patterns and language of Judaism; each week-day morning to the wood-scented, stained-glass solemnities of the Church of England; and the nights belonged to his own religion, the one he made up for himself, a strange, multicoloured pantheon in which the Lords of Chaos (Arioch, Xiombarg and the rest) rubbed shoulders with the Phantom Stranger from the DC Comics and Sam the trickster-Buddha from Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, and vampires and talking cats and ogres, and all the things from the Lang coloured Fairy books: in which all mythologies existed simultaneously, in a magnificent anarchy of belief.

Richard had, however, finally given up (with, it must be admitted, a little regret), his belief in Narnia. From the age of six -- for half his life -- he had believed devoutly in all things Narnian; until, last year, rereading *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* for perhaps the hundredth time, it had occurred to him that the transformation of the unpleasant Eustace Scrub into a dragon, and his subsequent conversion to belief in Aslan the lion, was terribly similar to the conversion of St. Paul, on the road to Damascus; if his blindness were a dragon...

This having occurred to him, Richard found correspondences everywhere, too many to be simple coincidence.

Richard put away the Narnia books, convinced, sadly, that they were allegory; that an author (whom he had trusted) had been attempting to slip something past him. He had had the same disgust with the Professor Challenger stories, when the bull-necked old professor became a convert to Spiritualism; it was not that Richard had any problems with believing in ghosts -- Richard believed, with no problems or contradictions, in **everything** -- but Conan Doyle was preaching, and it showed through the words. Richard was young, and innocent in his fashion, and believed that authors should be trusted, and that there should be nothing hidden beneath the surface of a story.

At least the Elric stories were honest. There was nothing going on beneath the surface

there: Elric was the etiolated prince of a dead race, burning with self-pity, clutching Stormbringer, his dark-bladed broadsword -- a blade which sang for lives, which ate human souls and which gave their strength to the doomed and weakened albino.

Richard read and re-read the Elric stories, and he felt pleasure each time Stormbringer plunged into an enemy's chest, somehow felt a sympathetic satisfaction as Elric drew his strength from the soul-sword, like a heroin addict in a paperback thriller with a fresh supply of smack.

Richard was convinced that one day the people from Mayflower Books would come after him for their 25 pence. He never dared buy any more books through the mail.

...

J.B.C. MacBride had a secret.

"You mustn't tell anyone."

"Okay."

Richard had no problem with the idea of keeping secrets. In later years he realised that he was a walking repository of old secrets, secrets that his original confidantes had probably long forgotten.

They were walking, with their arms over each other's shoulders, up to the woods at the back of the school.

Richard had, unasked, been gifted with another secret in these woods: it is here that three of Richard's schoolfriends have meetings with girls from the village, and where, he has been told, they display to each other their genitalia.

"I can't tell you who told me any of this."

"Okay," said Richard.

"I mean, it's true. And it's a deadly secret."

"Fine."

MacBride had been spending a lot of time recently with Mr Aliquid, the school chaplain.

"Well, everybody has two angels. God gives them one and Satan gives them one. So when you get hypnotised, Satan's angel takes control. And that's how Ouija boards work. It's Satan's angel. And you can implore your God's angel to talk through you. But real enlightenment only occurs when you can talk to your angel. He tells you secrets."

This was the first time that it had occurred to Grey that the Church of England might have its own esoterica, its own hidden caballah.

The other boy blinked owlshly. "You mustn't tell anyone that. I'd get into trouble if they

knew I'd told you."

"Fine."

There was a pause.

"Have you ever wanked off a grown up?" asked MacBride.

"No." Richard's own secret was that he had not yet begun to masturbate. All of his friends masturbated, continually, alone and in pairs or groups. He was a year younger than them, and couldn't understand what the fuss was about; the whole idea made him uncomfortable.

"Spunk everywhere. It's thick and oozy. They try to get you to put their cocks in your mouth when they shoot off."

"Eugh."

"It's not that bad." There was a pause. "You know, Mr Aliquid thinks you're very clever. If you wanted to join his private religious discussion group, he might say yes."

The private discussion group met at Mr Aliquid's small bachelor house, across the road from the school, in the evenings, twice a week after prep.

"I'm not Christian."

"So? You still come top of the class in Divinity, jewboy."

"No thanks. Hey, I got a new Moorcock. One you haven't read. It's an Elric book."

"You haven't. There isn't a new one."

"Is. It's called *The Jade Man's Eyes*. It's printed in green ink. I found it in a bookshop in Brighton."

"Can I borrow it after you?"

"Course."

It was getting chilly, and they walked back, arm in arm. Like Elric and Moonglum, thought Richard to himself, and it made as much sense as MacBride's angels.

...

Richard had daydreams in which he would kidnap Michael Moorcock, and make him tell Richard the secret.

If pushed, Richard would be unable to tell you what kind of thing the secret was. It was something to do with writing; something to do with gods.

Richard wondered where Moorcock got his ideas from.

Probably from the ruined temple, he decided, in the end, although he could no longer remember what the temple looked like. He remembered a shadow, and stars, and the feeling of pain at returning to something he thought long finished.

He wondered if that was where all authors got their ideas from, or just Michael Moorcock.

If you had told him that they just made it all up, out of their heads, he would never have believed you. There had to be a place the magic came from.

Didn't there?

...

"This bloke phoned me up from America the other night, he said 'Listen man, I have to talk to you about your religion'. I said 'I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't got any fucking religion.'"

Michael Moorcock, in conversation, Notting Hill, 1976.

...

It was six months later. Richard had been barmitzvahed, and would be changing schools soon. He and J.B.C. MacBride were sitting on the grass outside the school, in the early evening, reading books. Richard's parents were late picking him up from school.

Richard was reading *The English Assassin*. MacBride was engrossed in *The Devil Rides Out*.

Richard found himself squinting at the page. It wasn't properly dark yet, but he couldn't read any more. Everything was turning into greys.

"Mac? What do you want to be when you grow up?"

The evening was warm, and the grass was dry and comfortable.

"I don't know. A writer, maybe. Like Michael Moorcock. Or T.H. White. How about you?"

Richard sat and thought. The sky was a violet-grey, and a ghost-moon hung high in it, like a sliver of a dream. He pulled up a blade of grass, and slowly shredded it between his fingers, bit by bit. He couldn't say '*a writer*' as well, now. It would seem like he was copying. And he didn't want to be a writer. Not really. There were other things to be.

"When I grow up," he said, pensively, eventually, "I want to be a wolf."

"It'll never happen," said MacBride.

"Maybe not," said Richard. "We'll see."

The lights went on in the school windows, one by one, making the violet sky seem darker than it was before, and the summer evening was gentle and quiet. At that time of year the

day lasts forever, and the night never really comes.

“I’d like to be a wolf. Not all the time. Just sometimes. In the dark. I would run through the forests as a wolf, at night,” said Richard, mostly to himself. “I’d never hurt anyone. Not that kind of wolf. I’d just run and run forever in the moonlight, through the trees, and never get tired or out of breath, and never have to stop. That’s what I want to be when I grow up...”

He pulled up another long stalk of grass, expertly stripped the blades from it, and, slowly, began to chew the stem.

And the two children sat alone in the grey twilight, side by side, and waited for the future to start.



Michael Moorcock: Behold the Man

by Lou Anders

Michael Moorcock is threaded throughout the entire fabric of my childhood universe. I remember bookstores devoting entire shelves to the various novels of his multiverse, works I devoured as fast as I could get my hands on them. It was a natural leap from the Barsoom and Africa of Edgar Rice Burroughs to the darker, stranger worlds of Elric of Melniboné and Prince Corum Jhaelen Irsei. It was a jump into a never-ending abyss I took eagerly, knowing that the fall would stretch my mind in ways more profound than the Warlord of Mars or the Lord of the Jungle ever could. His reconstruction of the classic fantasy battle of Good vs. Evil into Law vs. Chaos had profound effects on my pre-teenage mind, fundamentally altering how I would forever view everything from politics to religion, let alone adventure. Even as a child, I could see how far reaching his influence ran – spilling out of the pages of swords and sorcery novels into other forms in a manner we would now refer to as “multi-media.” For what is Gary Gygax’s Alignment Chart if not the plotting of Good/Evil, Law/Chaos on an XY axis? And yes, I still have *that* edition of *Gods, Demi-Gods & Heroes*. And while I hadn’t heard much Hawkwind or the Deep Fix back then, I certainly knew Blue Öyster Cult. Moorcock was everywhere, a multiverse in his own right.

Sticking only to the subgenre he helped establish, that of swords & sorcery, Moorcock is a towering influence. By taking a teen-angst take on Conan the Barbarian, Moorcock created the quintessential +fantasy anti-hero, a non-human albino misfit, heir to the throne of a decadent and cruel society, who can only survive by stealing the life-force of others. After committing genocide against his own kind and massacring his demonic gods, Moorcock’s unlikely hero goes on to accidentally slay every friend and lover he ever has, his black sword Stormbringer hacking out a path straight to the pinnacle of fantasy-adventure stardom. In this regard alone, Moorcock’s influence on fantasy, on rock and roll, on video and roleplaying gaming was nothing short of profound. On gaming? Yes, because in promoting the smaller-stakes, more personal and grittier world of swords & sorcery, Moorcock was

profoundly influential on Dungeons & Dragons, and through it, on first the RPG realm and then the entire world of third person computer and console gaming that grew out of it.

And for many a writer, this would be more than enough – more than they could honestly ever hope for indeed– but Moorcock isn't just any writer. Because there is an entirely different side to the man. In 1988, his masterful *Mother London* was short-listed for the UK's most prestigious literary award, the Whitbread Prize, alongside of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Bruce Chatwin's *Utz*. This is the Moorcock of *Behold the Man*, that brilliantly controversial take on messiah complexes, religious obsession, and the crucifixion. This is the Guardian Fiction Prize-winning Moorcock of *The Condition of Muzak*, *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, *Gloriana*, *Byzantium Endures*, *The Laughter of Carthage*, *King of the City*. This is the Moorcock that *The Washington Post* called “one of the most serious literary lights of our time.” And again, this on its own is certainly more success than most will ever see in their career.

But it was only as an adult, looking back at the history of our field, and reading Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in Science Fiction* (Routledge & Keegan, 1983) and *Michael Moorcock: Death is No Obstacle* (Savoy Books, 1992) that I came to understand in full the equally – if not more – profound effect that Moorcock-the-editor had, who, in his capacity as head of *New Worlds* magazine (1964-1973), was the chief architect of what was perhaps speculative fiction's most important –some would say only true – literary movement. Moorcock pioneered the New Wave revolution that sought to blend the best of mainstream literary and science fiction technique in an atmosphere that encouraged a generation of writers to embrace the enthusiastic air of experimentation so prevalent in the 60s. Along with Brian Aldiss, J G Ballard, Harlan Ellison and others, he shepherded the movement that many see as ushering speculative fiction out of its adolescence into its adulthood. Though I didn't know it at the time, my earliest introduction to science fiction's prestigious classics of short fiction – works like Samuel Delaney's “Aye, and Gomorrah” and Harlan Ellison's “A Boy and His Dog” – those canonical masterpieces that are why I work in this genre today – wouldn't have existed at all if not for Moorcock the editor's influence. For someone who himself wrote so little actual science fiction, he has had a colossal effect on it. And that too, should be enough for any one lifetime....

Except that we must talk about his very real and pertinent contribution to theoretical physics. The term “multiverse” was created by pioneering American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910), who also gave us the term “stream of consciousness,” though he intended it to describe different psychological states, with no application to the workings of the physical world. It was Michael Moorcock who, independently of James, conceived the term to describe a universe of near-infinite parallel worlds for a story called “The Sundered Worlds” (published in *Science Fiction Adventures*, December 1962). Moorcock's use became the prevailing definition of the term, and has entered the popular consciousness to such a degree that it is now on the lip of every quantum physicist. In fact, this notion that our universe may be only one of a transfinite number of such realities, each only a few quantum decisions distance from its neighbor, is rapidly gaining credence as the most likely explanation for the peculiarities of quantum mechanics. As mind-boggling a concept as the multiverse is, Occam's razor increasingly comes down in its favor. And we have Moorcock to thank for describing it first.

And perhaps, that, finally, is enough for one lifetime. Except that the man is far from done.

It's been my privilege to have worked with Michael several times now, most recently as editor of his collection, *The Metatemporal Detective* (Pyr, 2007), which maps his multiverse onto the world of Victorian consulting detectives, taking Elric of Melniboné back to his roots and inspirations, combining him with Sexton Blake adversary Monsieur Zenith the Albino. It's one of my very favorite projects, something I am so proud to have worked on, but hardly the end of his output. With a biography of Mervyn Peake in the works, and a new Jerry Cornelius novel, as well as more Elric stories appearing, Michael Moorcock's multiverse just grows and grows and grows. And with new editions of the Elric novels coming out, all lavishly illustrated, the bookseller's shelves are starting to look again like I remember them. Like they always should in any corner of the multiverse worth living in.

"Heroes betray us," Michael Moorcock writes in his wisdom. "By having them, in real life, we betray ourselves." Powerful words, and I can only hope their author will forgive me then, if I use them as a springboard to say that he is mine, an author whose pen can only illuminate, never betray. Mike, you're a towering figure in 20th and 21st century literature, my vote for the single most influential person in speculative fiction, a lynchpin that if removed in some horrendous time-travelling mishap would bring the whole edifice crashing down. It's been my privilege to have been your editor a time or two, and to call you friend, but first and foremost, you'll always be my hero.



Confessions of an Elric Fanboy

by Paul S. Kemp

I'll let others speak to Moorcock's foundational role in the genre. They are, after all, more qualified than me for that. Me? I simply have a confession to make.

I am an Elric fanboy. There. I said it. Feels good to get it out.

My love of fantasy fiction started in a more or less traditional way. I began in fifth grade with Tolkien, whom I perceived as the father of the modern epic fantasy. And the tropes and archetypes he put forward in *The Lord of the Rings* served as my understanding of "fantasy" for years. I wanted to be Aragorn. I prayed I had some Elvish blood in my veins.

Ah, youth.

After that I went on a binge of Tolkien derivatives (*Shanarra*, *The Belgariad*, heck even McKiernan's *Iron Tower Trilogy*) and further cemented the idea in my mind that fantasy meant Middle Earth, or at least some reasonable facsimile thereof. Fantasy meant Good with a capital G and Evil with a capital E. Fantasy meant a white hero and a dark villain. What else could there possibly be?

Well, there could be Moorcock. I read *Elric of Melnibone* in junior high and it upset the applecart of my happy ignorance. In days, I devoured the entire Elric series through *Stormbringer*, which blew me away. Aragorn who? Gandalf what?

Moorcock forced me to reevaluate and reconceptualize fantasy fiction. Walls crumbled in my young mind. Gone were Dark Lords on their dark thrones, exiled but noble kings-in-waiting, plucky heroes under four feet tall. Gone was the necessity for Good and Evil in any objective sense. Instead, I read of men and women at turns venal and noble, at turns hateful and loving. I saw a world of incredible imagination (the Sea of Fate? The Eternal Champion? That's beautiful stuff) where good and evil were filtered through the lens of human (and not quite human) protagonists, not pre-existing metaphysics and divine fiat. Looking back now, the Elric stories strike me as nearly post-modernist in their moral sensibilities (at least until *Stormbringer*, when the whole previous moral construct is suddenly and brilliantly turned on its head; "I was ever more evil than thou." Indeed, indeed.).

If fantasy fiction were considered as Hegelian dialectic, Moorcock's Elric series would be the antithesis (Epic Pooh, anyone?) of Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring* thesis (which might make G.R.R. Martin their synthesis). Tolkien sets forth a world in which Platonism's objective Good and objective Evil do battle. There is little in-between. Moorcock's world spurns those clear moral delineations and explores, through the eyes of a not-quite-human-Elric, what it means to be human in a world of grays.

Please note that I'm not claiming Moorcock is superior to Tolkien or vice versa. Both crafted brilliant creations, but they do different things in different ways. For me, Tolkien explored what it meant to be human in the context of moral clarity. Moorcock explored what it meant to be human in the context of moral ambiguity. Comparing the two is like comparing the movies of Orson Wells and Sergio Leone. Both brilliant, but very different. Why bother comparing *Citizen Kane* to *The Good, the Bad, and Ugly*. I'd rather just enjoy both.

In Elric of Melinbone I'd encountered one of the most psychologically complex protagonists of fantasy fiction I'd ever read. Like most human beings (and unlike most of Tolkien's characters, save perhaps Boromir, Faramir, and Denethor), he fairly oozes contradictions – weakness from his albinism, strength of purpose and arm (but the latter only when drinking the vitality of others through *Stormbringer*), fierce loyalty to his friends (when he's not killing them), alternating hate and reverence for his people. In Elric, somehow, self-loathing and a fierce pride coexist and pour from the pages.

Elric is the anti-hero's anti-hero, capable of only a very limited expression of redeeming virtues. Think fantasy anti-hero and you think of Elric first. Or second. And if you don't think of him first or second, you're probably high and contemplating the micro-universe under your fingernail (duuuude!). Elric is not interested in redemption, as such. He's interested in *purpose*. But he is flawed and doomed, never to see or fully understand his purpose, and as he comes to realize that fact, so do we, and so do the characters around him. But we want to walk beside him to the doom, and we feel pity and pride in and for him as it approaches.

I marveled then and I marvel now at the quality of Elric's characterization. How could Moorcock reconcile all that contradiction, all those cross purposes, and cause such motivations to ring true? I don't have an answer, even now, and if I did I wouldn't want to ruin that ride for you. Read the stories yourself, then decide for yourself. Then take a step back and realize that Elric probably evokes a series of contradictory feelings in you, the reader, that he demonstrates on the page – simultaneous loathing and admiration and pity. That's the richness of Elric's story and the skill of Moorcock in telling it.

Moorcock's Elric stories strike me still as fearlessly and unselfconsciously willing to entertain, and in that they perfectly embody the ethos of sword and sorcery fantasy fiction. There's no pretense in them, no ham-handed attempt to elevate the storytelling to something critics and colleagues might consider "serious" or "literary." I imagine Moorcock sitting in a room somewhere, considering how he might subvert, reverse, or interrogate this or that trope, before finally saying "Hell with it," and writing the story he wanted to tell. And in answering to his own muse, his work went beyond merely serious or literary to become legendary in the genre.

And here's the thing about legends – they affect all that comes after. Legends reach down through time, grab later generations by the shirt, and give them a good shake. I was shook but good. My entire series of Erevis Cale stories and novels are, in part, an homage to the writer who broadened my conception of fantasy and showed me the subtleties of complex characterization.

Thanks, Mr. Moorcock. Much appreciated.

And now I've gushed enough. I need to go write.

Hell with it.



Moorcock: Mastery and Mad Dance

by Hal Duncan

This is a confession as much as a tribute. I am a dufus.

I came to Michael Moorcock late, an SF reader who'd taken an initially straightforward route in through the Golden Age SF of the Big Three -- Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke. I acquired a taste for the more twisted in the form of Philip K Dick, expanded the range of my reading by borrowing every Nebula anthology in the local library and taking a completist attitude to the "Classic SF" line put out by Gollancz in the 80s -- discovering Vonnegut, Sturgeon, Silverberg, Delany, Pohl & Kornbluth, Sladek, Ellison and more. Before I'd really got to grips with the notion of the New Wave, I heard about this British SF magazine called *Interzone* and started buying that, reading these weird-ass stories that sometimes sort of didn't make a whole lot of sense as far as I was concerned, callow youth that I was. I mean, they had the weirdness of Lindsay Anderson's *If...* rather than George Lucas's *Star Wars*. They were SF, but they were SF in a really fucked-up way. I didn't realise that what I was reading was the legacy of the New Wave.

Then along came cyberpunk and, caught up in the excitement over this wild new movement, I somehow managed to find myself focusing on this bleeding edge technonoir SF of mirrorshades and monofilament garottes. There was just so much cool new shit to read

in that explosion there wasn't time to get to grips with what had gone before. Occasionally I'd fill in some of the gaps in my awareness with an Aldiss here or a Ballard there, but somehow, inexplicably, even as I came to realise just how much of an impact the magazine *New Worlds* had on the field, just how sympathetic I was to this New Wave fiction it carried, with this chap called Michael Moorcock as its helmsman... somehow, I managed not to get around to his SF. I make no excuses for this. As I say, I am a dufus.

OK, one excuse, paltry and insufficient: I was heading for university now, an English Lit. student, so there was all this other weird shit to read -- Jorge Luis Borges and James Joyce, Angela Carter and Harold Pinter. There was magical realism and there was this stuff they were calling "slipstream", whatever the fuck that meant, this fiction that combined the mimesis of the domestic with the semiosis of the fantastic, this fiction that blended the two in a whole new way, where the sublime might erupt into the mundane but where the mundane might equally, at any moment, erupt into the sublime. I didn't know what "slipstream" meant. I didn't know that it meant "New Wave that wasn't born in the right time and place".

One thing I did know was that I wasn't a fan of Fantasy. I'd struggled through *The Lord of the Rings* even as it bored the shit out of me, from the Middle-England middle-class Nostalgia-land of the Shire (burn, motherfucker, burn! Run, hobbit, run!) to the five million pages at the end of Frodo and forelock-tugging Samwise Gamgee, class traitor, climbing up a fucking mountain (Oh, Master Frodo, let me carry you, let me hug you, let me lick your boot, Master Frodo). I gave up on *The Silmarillion* on its first page, had a go at Terry Brooks's *The Stuff of Shannamarama* and thought the better of it. Fantasy was not for me, I decided. I didn't know that everything I hated about Fantasy was everything Moorcock had been or would be writing about in his *Wizardry and Wild Romance*, a wickedly ascerbic Scouring of the Shite. When a few other members of the Glasgow SF Writers Circle that I was now a part of talked about this Elric character... well... I had my doubts.

I told you I'm a dufus.

Then one day, one member of the GSFWC, Gary Gibson, foisted the Cornelius Quartet on me, insisted that I read it, that really I couldn't not read it. I was, of course, blown away. This fucked-up narrative of Jerry Cornelius and the supporting cast, the mad dance of them around each other in a frenzy of forms, a literary Harlequinade. This fusion cuisine of fiction, folding in SF and 60s superspy movies, apocalyptic and kaleidoscopic... and all of it resolving in the final book of the quartet, into this mundane narrative of a spotty adolescent in a flat in London, dreaming of being a rock star, every heroic wank-fantasy of macho pulp utterly subverted into the worldscape of the dismal miserabilist British soap opera *East-enders*. It was beautiful.

In the next few years I may have gone a little crazy, discovering the three-book volumes of the whole *Eternal Champion* series, discovering Oswald Bastable and Elric and Corum and Hawkmoor and von Bek and Count Brass and the Dancers at the End of Time. There may have been points where, coming to it late and without any great love for sword-play and sorcerous marvels, I didn't quite have the thrill I know I would have had on immersing my-

self in this multiversal hero's exploits at a younger age, but at other points... Who can *not* love the end of the Corum books, where the two gods save the day by dispatching the Lords of Chaos, only to then wipe out the Lords of Order too, just for the sake of balance? Who can *not* love the vicious parody of Reagan as a scout leader in the first Bastable book? Who can not love the radical political stance articulated in the anarchistic anti-heroics of Elric, the direct answer to all the Will-to-Power rhetoric of the genre? And, hell, as if that isn't enough, the man wrote *Mother London*, a book which does for his native city what Joyce's *Ulysses* did for his (and I'm not sure if I can think of higher praise than that.)

All those things I didn't realise over the years, the profound impact Moorcock had on the genre, I see now in the profound impact he had on me even before I'd fucking read him. And since I've read him? I make no bones about his deep influence on my own work. The multiversal backdrop of *Vellum* and *Ink* is a conscious re-articulation of Moorcock's, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. The Jack Flash of *Vellum* and *Ink* is a splinter of his Eternal Champion -- a little Oswald Bastable and a whole fuckload of Jerry Cornelius, *Commedia dell'Arte* references and all. The first appearances of that Jack Flash character, in fact, were in a series of stories titled "The Final Analysis", "The Angel Assassin", and "A Cure for Karma"; nuff said. If I came to Moorcock late he's nevertheless been one of the most formative influences in my writing.

So I'm well chuffed to see him receiving the well-deserved accolade of Grand Master. The title couldn't be more fitting for a writer of such mastery, and I'm happy, so happy, to have had the chance to fling myself into the mad dance of his fiction. I only wish I hadn't been so much of a dufus for so many years, dragging my feet as I stumbled around the edges of his wild and whirling waltz.



The Moorcock Effect

by Bryan Talbot

Brian Holt. What a great teacher.

Good teachers bring their subject alive. They transmit their enthusiasm. It's infectious and addictive and, apart from hooking you with a habit that will last a lifetime, they introduce you to material you've never previously encountered, material that will change your life.

Brian ("Bri") Holt was my English teacher for the last two years of my secondary school education at Wigan Boys' Grammar School, circa 1968/70 and he was the best schoolteacher I ever encountered. He brought Shakespeare, Dickens, Graham Greene, *The Canterbury Tales* et al to life for me. I'd enjoyed reading stories ever since I could do so but "English Literature" had for me always been cloaked with a dusty and stultifying patina of boredom. Up until Bri, my English teachers were, on the whole, old and apathetic gown-shrouded bores who were reduced to repeating mantras they'd been trotting out since the late cretaceous. They also wore mortarboards on occasion, rendering them even more antediluvian.

Bri never wore a gown, not for teaching anyway. He shone. He stalked up and down his classroom, in which he had arranged the desks so we could view his performance in the round, reading texts out loud with an actor's skill and generally holding forth like a witty and eloquent evangelist for literature. As well as a teacher, he was also the director of the plays performed at the school and the local am dram group.

Once a week he made a point of deviating from the ordained curriculum and simply reading us a chapter or sequence from a book or short story completely detached from our prescribed exam texts, anything from Henry Miller to science fiction. I was already a fan of horror fiction and had read some SF (struggling through *Frankenstein* when I was twelve) but he introduced us to a genre I knew little about: Fantasy. He started with *The Lord of the Rings*: the Mines of Moria sequence. Good start. A month or two later he announced that the reading for the week was the last chapter of *Stormbringer* by one Michael Moorcock.

That was it. The grammar school was in the centre of Wigan and, as soon as the bell sounded for lunch hour, I immediately rushed out and bought the book along with the collection of earlier Elric stories, *The Stealer of Souls*. I was hooked.

And I was lucky to be hooked at exactly this time. Though there were a few books already available, I was able to read most of Mike's output as it was published. I breathlessly raced my way through each book of the Hawkmoon, Count Brass, Corum, Eternal Champion and *Dancers at the End of Time* series. The sheer visionary experiences I enjoyed reading these stories blew my mind. A quaint expression I agree, but it perfectly describes the effect they had. The Oswald Bastable books, steampunk well before the genre definition, were a huge influence on me, along with the Jerry Cornelius and Una Persson stories. And, just when I thought I knew his range, Mike would produce something like *The Brothel on Rosenstrasse*, *The Retreat From Liberty* or *Mother London*.

I started my career in Brit underground comics and the first few I did, although mainly hallucinogenic picturebooks for acidheads and the terminally stoned, were very much influenced by Mike's psychedelic sensibilities and the whole ethos of shifting realities that pervades his writings. In 1976, when I had the opportunity to do a science fiction strip, I jumped at the chance to produce a comic in line and watercolour wash, the medium of a favourite underground comic artist of mine, Richard Corben. I needed a suitable story and hero.

I'd read somewhere, probably in *New Worlds*, that Moorcock had designed Jerry Cornelius to be a sort of template – a protagonist any writer was free to use. I don't know if this was correct, looking back, but that's how I understood it at the time, so I based my English assassin, Luther Arkwright, on JC. This first adventure, an eight-pager, was entitled *The Papist Affair*. It was a violent, tongue-in-cheek romp set in a parallel England rent by religious wars and featured such unutterable silliness as machine gun-toting, cigar-smoking nuns clad in black stockings and garter belts, the "sacred relics of Saint Adolf of Nuremburg" and a kung fu fight with an evil archbishop (later plagarized in Grant Morrison's very first published comic strip starring his own copycat Cornelius, Gideon Stargrave).

It was only after I'd finished drawing the strip that I started thinking about the character and situation in any real depth. Parallel worlds were nothing new in SF but I'd been introduced to the concept through Mike's stories and I found the notion fascinating. Ideas

flooded my imagination. I saw that here was a great potential for another Arkwright story, a serious story, bigger, more intricate and, more importantly, my own. Cornelius' "Time Centre" evolved into my "Parallel 00.00.00" – a whole atheist temporal alternative at peace within itself, ruled by science and logic and bent on "maintaining the equilibrium" in a multiverse infiltrated and corrupted by "Disruptors". The story itself was a vague metaphor for the second law of thermodynamics.

I reinvented my protagonist. Arkwright ceased to be a Cornelius clone and became his own man: one part David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, one part Clint Eastwood's *Man With No Name*, one part me. I saw him as part of a literary progression that went something like: Sherlock Holmes > Phillip Marlowe > James Bond > Jerry Cornelius > Luther Arkwright. The whole story was filtered through a wide gamut of influences from Nic Roeg through Robert Anton Wilson to William Hogarth via Sam Peckinpah and William Blake. Mike's influence was still definitely there to be seen – Arkwright had white hair and his companion, the flatulent, foul-mouthed Harry Fairfax, was clearly a bastard cousin of Moonglum – but the hero and story were definitely mine. I discussed this once with Mike and he agreed, much to my relief, and later kindly wrote the introduction to the Arkwright graphic novel.

Of course, this wasn't the first time he'd influenced comic creators. In the early 70s, Marvel Comics' innovative *Adam Warlock*, complete with a soul-stealing jewel in his skull, was an obvious homage by writer/artist Jim Starlin,. In the UK, Jim Cawthorn adapted several Moorcock stories for Savoy Books in the late 70s and the French SF comic *Metal Hurlant* featured Moorcock inspired strips, notably Moebius' *The Airtight Garage of Jerry Cornelius* and and Phillipe Druillet's *Elic*. Since then, Mike's ideas have become part of the SF and fantasy comic language, totally pervading both genres.

And I've worked intermittently in the world of steampunk ever since: drawing the *Gothic Empire* storyline in *Nemesis the Warlock* for *2000AD* and writing and drawing *Teknophage* for Tekno Comix. *The Adventures of Luther Arkwright* was the first steampunk graphic novel and has been in print for thirty years in several countries, now in a new digitally remastered edition. A few years ago I wrote and drew the sequel, *Heart of Empire* and I'm currently working on a steampunk detective-thriller, *Grandville*, none of which would have come to pass without the direct influence of Michael Moorcock who changed my life by teaching me, through his writings, a way of viewing the world and a way of perceiving fiction.

He and Bri Holt have a lot to answer for.

Bryan Talbot
Sunderland 2008

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The Rhondda Rendezvous

by Rhys Hughes

1.

It was half past midnight when Jerry Cornelius returned to Tenby as a last desperate resort. There are many desperate resorts along the South Wales coast. Tenby's turn had finally come.

Jerry drove a Gilbern and smoked a cheroot as he changed gear. It wasn't easy swapping jacket and trousers while driving. When the process was complete, he changed gear. He felt unfashionable.

But disguise was important here.

The antiquated car radio played an early song by the Manic Street Preachers, so distorted it was impossible to make out the words. It was like music from another county.

Jerry fiddled with the tuner and found a news bulletin.

"New border clashes include spitting and swearing!" announced the announcer. It was getting nasty.

As he entered the town and drove towards the beach, he reflected on how much he trusted his own motives. Not at all, he decided cheerfully. He wound down the window and the smack of salt air came to him like the kiss of a wet dog. He sniffed.

A late reveller turned out of a pub and flagged him down.

"You from round here?"

"Not as such," admitted Jerry.

"Where you from then?"

Jerry decided to take a risk. "Next town over."

"Where's that then?"

"Sort of in a sideways direction. I'm no good at geography. A bit further than the edge of this place."

"Don't like the sound of that, do I?"

Jerry nodded. "Stick with what you know."

The man winked. "That's right, good advice, can't be too careful. See this knitted tie? My gran made that for me, said it would never let me down, and it hasn't, not once, ever."

"That's stability for you," agreed Jerry. He accelerated away and turned down Battery Road onto the Esplanade. The Gilbern was sluggish and he was grateful to abandon it near the museum, where it rightfully belonged. He walked rapidly past the castle to the quay. The yacht was waiting for him, a badly carved wooden dragon fixed to the prow like a figure-head, leering awkwardly.

Jerry sighed deeply. Of all places. Wales.

He was truly stuck this time.

2.

Caldey Island monastery was still in good condition. The hole in the roof of the refectory let in the rain but not much light. Jerry followed the silent servant to the round table and took his place. His neighbours squinted at his clothes and nodded.

Jerry wore a dragon flag t-shirt and a woollen jacket and faded red braces held up his thick cord trousers. On his head he sported a crushed bowler hat. His feet were clamped in hob-nailed boots.

He fitted in perfectly.

There were six figures already seated on the low chairs. He was the seventh. There was one empty space. The table bore a striking pattern, eight arrows pointing eight different ways, but one of these arrows was straighter, thicker and longer than the others, as if urging them to swing round and point in its direction.

"Robert will soon be here," said the man opposite Jerry.

"He prefers a dramatic entrance?"

"I don't think so. He's just very busy. Why don't I introduce the company to you? I am Dafydd ap Bedwyr and I represent the Druids. This is Owein ap Cadwr for the Shepherds."

The introductions continued.

"Iorwerth ap Sawyl of the Miners... Garanwyn ap Mercher of the Chapels... Peredur ap Rhuvawn of the Rugby Players... Teirwaedd ap Ysgithyrwyn of the Caravan Parks. And you are?"

"Jerry Cornelius. Drugs and Grooves."

"Do you mock us? You must have an 'ap'. Who are you the son of?"

Jerry pondered. "Call me Jerry ap Man."

“Apeman?” They enjoyed the joke.

Jerry had won them over and was safe. He mouthed the word quietly to himself and was misunderstood.

“Oh yes,” said Dafydd, “we’re quite safe here. Robert managed to purchase eight radiological Alazan rockets from the breakaway Russian republic of Transdniester. He fired one straight at Caldey Island. The contamination is not particularly harmful but it keeps snoopers at bay. Too much broken crockery, though.”

“Does he intend to do that before every meeting?” asked Jerry.

“Such precautions are necessary, I fear.”

Jerry nodded. “And fun.”

They laughed again but inside Jerry felt a growing sickness that had nothing to do with gamma rays.

3.

After the meeting, Jerry lay on his bed. Part of the problem was that ‘nationalism’ was not a dirty word in Wales. In fact it was considered highly desirable to have nationalistic tendencies. This gave Robert the perfect cover for his scheme.

For the first time in decades the most historically inaccurate but powerful factions of Welsh culture had agreed to work as a team. Wales was such a fragmented place. What had ever kept it together? Something as simple and strong as boredom?

Jerry rose and strolled through the monastery.

The rain outside had stopped but the wind still howled. Glancing at his wristwatch, Jerry noted that the spinning dials were speeding up and slowing down, but without any discernible pulse. Like everything else in Wales, time here was undecided.

The interior of the monastery was illuminated by dim electric lamps hung from the ceiling at random intervals. Jerry kept tripping over his own flares. His burberry pyjamas were far too long, but any deviation in any detail would be his undoing.

From somewhere ahead, a radio played a Super Furry Animals song, so dated already, a desperate echo of the brief Welsh Revival of the 1990s, when provincial bands seemed more sagacious and sharp than anything from the metropolis, and may well have been.

Jerry passed through a shattered doorway into a courtyard. Slogans were still potent in this land. When people heard the call to KEEP WALES TIDY they thought only of excluding the English. They didn’t think about who would really be excluded. The far right had found a different agenda using the same terminology. Now they could exploit it for their own ends without modifying their language.

Jerry blinked. Here was the proof.

Robert Wyvern was goosestepping on the gravel, raising his arm in a curiously limp Nazi salute. Behind him real geese followed in his tracks, pecking at the imprint of his heels, the studs having left marks like irregular crumbs of bread.

4.

Angharad sat in a pink twinset in her jumpjet. She yawned as she waited for Jerry to climb into the cockpit behind her. The aircraft wheezed and gasped. The fuselage was by Tupolev, the wings by Boeing, the engines by Schweppes. It was not a vital VTOL.

“Funds are low, Mr C,” she said apologetically.

“I’ve tightened my belt.” He tried to relax into his seat, found himself feeling itchy and blue.

“It’s the sticks, you see,” she added.

“Provincial entropy is the hardest to do anything with,” he sighed. He stared at the back of her head as she steered the shuddering bucket into the sky. He felt even more sick.

“It was customised by a farmer,” she continued.

Something cracked somewhere. Time and space became a quick downward spiral. Angharad apologised again as they dropped into the crater dug by their own jets. The impact jarred his bones.

“Those bleeding buggers!”

“Now, now Mr C, don’t say you didn’t anticipate it.”

“Fobbing us off with junk.”

“Not the first time, so I’ve heard, eh?”

“Anything broken?”

She was bewildered. “Most things, surely. You don’t mean to say you expect anything to be whole again?”

“I suppose not,” he conceded.

“Devolution, Mr C, it just keeps *going*.”

5.

Jerry woke with a throbbing headache and a body covered with bruises. He wondered if he had enjoyed himself the previous night or not. Then as he slowly stood, the bruises began to sting.

Yes, clearly a good time.

Angharad had left her suspender belt behind.

There was a knock on the door. A delivery man wheeled in a gigantic box. This was his replacement transport. Alvarez at the Time Centre must have sent it before the crash.

“He knew all along,” Jerry muttered ruefully.

Then he laughed and began carefully unpacking the kit. Whatever it was, it had to be better than the cobbled jumpjet. He turned his head to glance through the grimy window of the hotel. The wreck still rested on the beach, a new tourist attraction.

How long before the local council printed leaflets proclaiming it a sight worth an *afternoon's detour*? At least a few years. By that time it would have been stripped bare.

Devolution and diversification are not the same thing at all, Jerry mused as he studied the assembly instructions. An amphibious craft, very experimental, partly inflatable. The canister of nitrogen was included. He scratched his reeling head.

The roar of an Alazan rocket made the window rattle. Jerry turned and followed the wavering vapour trail. Robert was preparing the next meeting place. Somewhere near Swansea.

Jerry hastily slotted together the components and used the canister to inflate the machine. It was almost as big as the room. There was no way he would get it through the door. Fortunately the beak of the craft concealed a 76.2mm Kurchevsky recoilless cannon. Jerry jumped into the driving seat and fired a short burst at the wall.

Pallid residents stumbled and coughed in panic as the machine nosed through collapsing masonry and over little hills of rubble. Then with a triumphant squeal, Jerry accelerated towards the industry scarred lands of the east, a message in his heart and a Hungarian 7.65 Fegyvergyar pistol holstered at his hip. Just like the old days.

But in Wales it was always the old days.

6.

In the ruins of the giant statue of Catherine Zeta-Jones, the delegates gathered. The icy waves broke with a chiding slap on the plaster ankles. Once this had been the site of the Mumbles lighthouse but the local council had known better. The 300 metre tall figure, circa *Darling Buds of May*, had glared down at Swansea on the other side of the bay. Now only the lower half remained. A cheap erection, typical of anything to do with Catherine.

Posters flapped on her calves announcing forthcoming gigs in local venues. Jerry was excited to spy a torn flier with *Stereo* printed on it, but when he rejoined the fluttering half he saw the rest of the word was *phonics* instead of *lab*. Other bands on the same bill included Catatonia, The Caves and The Frictionless Man. For better and for worse, Jerry knew them all personally. He went inside.

Sweeping geiger counters from side to side, silent servants found the least harmful spot for setting up the round table. As Jerry glanced around, he recognised a familiar face.

“Miss Brunner,” he groaned.

“I guessed you might turn up,” she sniffed. She was dressed in the full cliched costume, stovepipe hat coated in plaster dust and a wilted daffodil pinned to her collar. She met his gaze and licked her lips. “So you’re the devil in Miss Jones?”

“What happened to Dafydd ap Bedwyr?”

“Crushed by a collapsing menhir. Bloody thing must have been on the verge of toppling for centuries. Unless it was a Victorian folly. I saw my chance and took his place.”

“You don’t look very convincing,” Jerry observed.

“It’s a question of attitude.”

“Women aren’t allowed to be Druids, are they?” he insisted.

She applied her lipstick and snapped shut her vanity case. “You’ll have to define *allow* for me. Movement always relies on allowances being made. Robert is English, you know.”

Jerry nodded. “Revolutions are never straightforward. Owain Glyndwr made alliances with the English too. Whatever works, I suppose. All the same, that costume is a trifle...”

She arched an eyebrow. “A trifle what?”

Jerry rubbed his chin. “Just that. A trifle. Did you expect more? I mean it’s a sickly concoction.”

Miss Brunner laughed. “In 1797 the French invaded Wales at Pen Caer but surrendered when they encountered a group of local women dressed in traditional hats and red flannel dresses. I’ve done my research. It was the last attempted invasion of Britain, although I’m sure Robert would disagree with that statement.”

“Quite,” said a voice behind her. It was Robert himself. His mood was ebullient as he rubbed his sweaty palms together. “What the hell is that vehicle parked outside the doorway?”

Jerry lit a cheroot. “A Duck Billed Platitude.

Robert patted Jerry on the arm. “Good to see you have a sense of humour. Or is it irony? Or allegory? It doesn’t matter. Our movement has always needed men with a light touch. All those drinking songs and starched armbands can get a bit boring, what?”

“No it really is a Duck Billed Platitude. Come and have a look at the engines. They were made by Canada Dry.”

“Later, Mr Cornelius, later.”

7.

The British National Party has unveiled its new tactic to win the race hate vote in Wales — party political broadcasts in Welsh.

The far right party's leader Nick Griffin, who lives in Powys, will star in the English version of the video, but his 17 year old daughter will front the Welsh language rant on deporting and repatriating non-whites from the UK.

It's the party's latest role for Jennifer Griffin, a pupil at Ysgol Gyfun Llanfair Caereinion near Welshpool, who has admitted she would like to become BNP leader. She already chairs the BNP Supporters' Club — a group for 14 to 18 year olds.

The broadcasts are part of their biggest ever assault on Wales as the party attempts to get a foothold in councils and puts up two candidates for the European elections.

They will be screened on terrestrial television in the lead-up to polling day on June 10.

Politicians last night dismissed the ads as a stab at gaining a "cloak of respectability".

But Mr Griffin insists there is support in Wales, particularly on "English migration" to Wales, which he claimed is "pushed by the multi-cultural society of England.

WALES ON SUNDAY, May 9, 2004

8.

"The trouble is," said Stuart as he lowered the heat on the stove, "that when I began losing my friction I envisioned all sorts of opportunities slipping through my fingers."

Jerry was cleaning his 9mm Luger. "I bet."

"In fact it just meant they fell into my lap instead." Turning away from the bubbling lasagne Stuart looked up. His girlfriend had just come home from university. Monica threw her battered copies of Kant onto the table and nodded at Jerry.

"Hello Mr C. What can we do for you?"

"It's a question of drag," Jerry admitted.

"I can wear some of Monica's clothes," Stuart offered.

Jerry shook his head. "Business first. The drag I'm referring to is the component of the aerodynamic force on an aircraft that lies along the longitudinal axis. What do you know

about ground effect vehicles?”

“I flew an A-90 Orlyonok Ekranoplan once.”

“Efficiency is the key,” said Jerry. “This isn’t a rich country and the cheaper anything can be done the better. Mass movement is my latest hobby. With practise I might get good at it.”

“Shall we play before or after dinner?” Stuart asked.

“Might as well get the work done first.”

Stuart nodded. “Do you mind jamming without a drummer?”

“No, that’s fine. My Gibson’s packed up. May I borrow yours? If you don’t have one, a Stratocaster will do.”

“I have a Rickenbacker.”

Stuart went to look for the instrument and Jerry turned to Monica. “Curious that you live in Delhi Street.”

“All the streets around here are named after battles. I think Delhi was a battle, wasn’t it?”

“Well it might be.” Jerry blinked.

Stuart returned with the guitar. “I’ll turn the stove off. Don’t want the lasagne burning, do we?”

They tuned up and plugged in. They quickly went through the entire Frictionless Man set. Soon the dust in every room was airborne, every speck floating through the half grey, half milky light that pushed into the house from the Welsh sky.

“That will do.” Jerry nodded and unplugged.

“Righto, Mr C,” replied Stuart as he went back into the kitchen to heat up the lasagne again. There was no entropy here. It was an oasis of mood, meals and mutability.

Jerry started up the Goblin 320 series cylinder vacuum cleaner and moved through the house sucking up the dust. When the bag was full he switched it off and settled down on a chair.

Stuart dished up briskly. “What do you want my skin flakes for, Mr C, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Coating. Better than Teflon,” Jerry answered.

9.

On the roof of the Brendan Guest House, Aberystwyth. They had erected a tarpaulin to protect themselves from the worst of the rain, but it blew sideways and diluted their cocktails.

So much for a romantic evening in starlight. So much for settling for less.

“Bloody Wales. What am I doing here?”

Angharad said, “How do you think I feel? I was pulled out of India for this assignment. I’d only been travelling around for three months and was getting into the vibe.”

“I’ve forgotten what the sun looks like.”

“It’s night, Mr C.”

“Every time he holds a meeting, Robert convinces another of the major stereotypes. He doesn’t need to be too clever or too charming. He’s done the minimum necessary. I bet he feels there’s something lacking. His kind like to compare themselves to dynamos. Eight different locations, eight different purposes, but really just one direction. Funny how law can hide in chaos, and chaos in law. Robert promises dynamism but will deliver stagnation.”

“Constant readjustments aren’t for everyone.”

“It seems a thankless task sometimes.”

“But you wouldn’t feel comfortable doing anything else. What choice do you have, realistically? Law and Chaos are both self-destructive. Law denies everything, even time, because time is movement, so when it gets what it wants it vanishes, because it no longer exists in time. Chaos in contrast admits everything, even order, and so will eventually get stuck in a groove which includes *permanent* stability as one of its qualities. Striking a balance is the only option.”

“I’ve made my bed,” Jerry agreed. “I’m just tired of lying in it.”

“It’s our bed now,” corrected Angharad.

Jerry wept. With gratitude.

10.

Bishop Beesley eased his enormous bulk out of the wicker chair and waddled to the bar for another glass of milk stout. It was quiet in *The Jolly Englishman* tonight. Captain Maxwell, Sir Kingsley and Lady Sunday lounged in their own chairs around the table, tearing beer mats into neat strips and muttering.

“I wonder how Miss Brunner is getting on?”

“As best as she can, no doubt.” The Bishop returned with his drink and sat back down with a contented sigh. He licked his sticky fingers and unwrapped another chocolate bar.

“Do you think she can handle Cornelius?”

“Well it’s always worth a try.” The Bishop seemed oblivious of the sombre mood. He munched happily.

“But if Wales wins its independence what’s to stop the fringe counties of England following suit? We might end up with Yorkshire and Cornwall seceding from the union.”

“And even Surrey and Sussex,” beamed the Bishop. He gestured with his half eaten Mars. “I know what worries you. It worries me too. Where does devolution stop? Independent cities and towns, independent streets, independent individuals. But I have faith.”

“In what exactly?”

Something inside the Bishop seemed to deflate but he remained as gross on the outside as ever. “It’s my job, dear boy.” Then he leaned forward and slurped his beer from the glass without lifting it. “I suppose we might reconsider our options.”

“Heaven help us,” chorused the others.

11.

Back at the Time Centre, Alvarez demonstrated his latest device to Jerry with an insouciant air. The response was good with almost no unintended hiss. Jerry nodded his approval and Alvarez smirked. High above them the subway trains rumbled and sparked.

“Gorky’s Zygotic Mynchi. In the entirety of Wales there’s no music more evocative of the ‘70s.”

“Which ‘70s exactly?”

Alvarez shrugged. “Any one.”

“As long as I can take my pick,” said Jerry. He was feeling better physically but was emotionally depressed.

“Shame it didn’t work out with Angharad.”

“But it did,” Jerry responded. “She’s returned to India. Who am I to hold her back? She’s young.”

“Our turn will come,” said Alvarez hopefully.

“Shall we begin?” asked Jerry.

Alvarez nodded. “Do you know anything about the Main?”

“Part of New England surely?”

“Not this time. I’m talking about the Spanish Main. The islands of the Caribbean. The Antilles, Jamaica.”

“Are we going to buy our way out of this one?”

Alvarez nodded bleakly. “Feels almost like cheating, doesn’t it? A paradox. But you can’t transmogrify a Wyvern. There’s no other method, at least none we can *afford*.”

“You are a wag,” said Jerry unconvincingly.

Alvarez handed him the flintlock pistol. Jerry pressed the barrel against his right temple and pulled the trigger. The opening chords of ‘Merched ya Neud Gwallt eu Gilydd’ flooded the Time Centre. With a pop of imploding air Jerry vanished and Alvarez returned to his monitors.

12.

The pirates sat around the table and laughed. The ship swayed at anchor and the lanterns squealed as they moved, the wicks spluttering. Burning whale oil made the vessel smell like a Bridgend high street on Saturday evening. It truly was 1671. Jerry fitted in perfectly. Tufts of his hair were knotted with black ribbons and he had a broad white stripe painted across his face. His false leg was false and his hook hand was also fake but the creak of his boots was real.

“Give us that shanty again! ‘Tis rare!” one shouted.

“Aye, a rum tune!” cried another.

Jerry rolled his eyes in exasperation but obliged. He gritted his teeth and sang, “*Is this the way to Amarillo, every night I’ve been hugging my pillow, dreaming dreams of Amarillo...*”

“Har! har! har!” roared the pirates.

“He sings it like a woman!” approved one.

“Let’s go and sack that Armadillo!” suggested another.

“Burn it to the ground!” seconded a third.

“And kill all the Spaniards we find inside! Call the captain. Where is Armadillo? Fetch the charts!”

“*Amarillo*,” corrected Jerry. It was going to be a long evening.

He was rescued by the captain himself. Henry Morgan came down the companionway and stood on the warped boards with his hands on his hips and a pipe clenched between his thick lips. His expression was a mixture of admiration and regret. He nodded at Jerry and waved to his men. Jerry stood unsteadily and followed him to the deck. The mist slicked his face like cold chip oil. He sneezed.

“It’s not too late to change your mind,” said Morgan.

Jerry smiled thinly. “I made a vow.”

“This is awfully good of you. I never expected anyone to volunteer. I assumed I would have to use force.”

Jerry squinted into the mist. “Where are we?”

“Off the coast of South Wales.”

“Really? I imagined you might choose Cuba or the Bahamas.”

“Are you disappointed? It seems to me that nobody will ever think of looking here. I’m quite a sentimental old sod too, if truth be told. I know I shouldn’t be, but I am.”

“Like a character in an early John Steinbeck novel,” Jerry said. He noticed the frown on Morgan’s face and added, “Let’s get it over with. I am cold, tired and a little sick.”

“After you, dear boy.”

Jerry climbed over the rail and used the rope ladder to lower himself into the longboat. Morgan followed. Then they cast off and Jerry rowed through the mist. He followed Morgan’s complicated directions, veering first one way, then another, to confuse any observers on the ship. But in fact the mist was too thick for even the most powerful spyglass to penetrate.

Shingle crunched beneath them. Jerry leaped out and dragged the boat onto the beach. Morgan strutted forward and pointed at the mouth of a narrow cave. “This is the one.”

Jerry heaved the heavy chest out of the boat and staggered after Morgan into the cave. The chest was full of the choicest treasure from the looting of Panama. Morgan lit a lantern and cast a spade at Jerry’s feet. “Dig here. It’s the perfect spot.”

When Jerry had finished, Morgan smiled affectionately at him and said, “You know I have to kill you now, to protect my secret. Your ghost will stand guard over my treasure for a thousand years. Well, I don’t really believe that, but it may put your mind at ease. Once again, I’m awfully grateful to you.”

“No problem,” said Jerry. As Morgan fumbled for the pistol at his belt, Jerry handed him his own flintlock. “Here, use this. It’s a very nice model with an ivory handle.”

Morgan took it and pointed it at Jerry. A relay inside clicked and the music began playing in reverse.

Jerry vanished.

13.

Miss Brunner held a scarf to her face as they waddled down the muddy lanes of the Vale of Glamorgan. The Duck Billed Platitute stank almost as bad as the landscape. Poison leaked from the spur on its back leg. It would soon conk out completely.

Jerry was in his element, an orange Nepalese shirt on his back, a pair of Turkish trousers

on his legs, Italian shoes on his feet. He was armed only with a khukri but he radiated confidence and danger. As Miss Brunner sniffed unhappily he patted her saucily on the leg with a hand glittering with silver rings.

“What made your side decide to throw in with my lot?”

She gritted her teeth. “We despise your whimsicality slightly less than his version of stability. While we approve of his aims, we can’t condone the way he intends to achieve them. We don’t want an independent Wales, not even a clean one.”

“Nothing like a bit of internecine,” said Jerry.

“Hurry up, can’t you?”

Jerry said, “This is the beach.” He turned the vehicle down a steep path and cut the engine on the sand. He helped Miss Brunner climb down and led her to the cave mouth. The moment they were inside he handed her the shovel. “I buried it. You can dig it up.”

“Curious idea of fair play you have,” she whined.

“Symmetry isn’t always fair.”

“I suppose not.” With a snort she began work. “Will this really be enough to pay for what you intend?”

“I think so.” He smoked a green Fortuna.

Half an hour later the spade struck the chest. He unsheathed the khukri and approached her almost timidly. “You don’t mind, do you? I can’t afford to share. I need every last drop of it.”

“Really, Mr C,” she muttered as he cut her throat.

14.

A BBC journalist is urging helpful linguists to come forward to help solve a mystery — why the Hindi accent has so much in common with Welsh.

Sonia Mathur, a native Hindi speaker, had her interest sparked when she moved from India to work for the BBC in Wales — and found that two accents from countries 5000 miles apart seemed to have something in common.

It has long been known that the two languages stem from Indo-European, the “mother of all languages” — but the peculiar similarities between the two accents when spoken in English are striking.

Ms Mathur explained that when she moved to Wales, everyone instantly assumed she was Welsh from her accent.

“I would just answer the phone, and they would say ‘oh hello, which part of Wales are you from?’ she said.

“I would explain that I’m not from Wales at all — I’m from India. It was just hilarious each time this conversation happened.”

But not only do the two languages’ accents share notable common features — their vocabularies do too.

Ms Mathur’s own research on basic words, such as the numbers one to 10 found that many words were similar — “seven”, for example, is “saith” in Welsh, “saat” in Hindi.

She later spoke to Professor Colin Williams of Cardiff University’s School of Welsh, who specialises in comparative languages.

He suggested that the similarities are because they come from the same mother language — the proto-European language.

“It was basically the mother language to Celtic, Latin and Sanskrit,” Ms Mathur added. “So basically that’s where this link originates from.”

BBC news, 14th March 2005

15.

Robert Wyvern parked his Range Rover and stepped cautiously out into the light drizzle. He avoided the worst of the puddles and the fatalism in his eyes was wholly affected. As he approached Jerry he nodded curtly and lowered his cricket bag.

“I have to say I’m dreadfully disappointed with you.”

“You must have known I was a traitor to your cause. Miss Brunner blew my cover, didn’t she?”

Robert lowered his head. “Of course. But I appreciated your drive. And I thought at least you’d let me kick out the Bengalis. Now you’ll be stuck with them on your turf.”

“Wales desperately needs colour,” quipped Jerry.

“Damn it man, what’s wrong with having just one tiny corner of this sceptered isle reserved for whites?”

Jerry misheard. “Septic? Yes I suppose it is.”

“The final meeting would have been in Maerdy in the Rhondda, the cradle of socialism in Wales. Ironic, don’t you think?”

“I don’t much involve myself with irony these days.” Jerry shrugged his apology. “Shall we

toss for it?”

“I don’t have to agree to this you know.”

“Come now, how can you resist the challenge of a cricket match?” Jerry threw the coin. It was double headed. “Seems that I get to bowl. It’s all in the wrist.”

“Are those the wickets?” Robert asked glumly.

He squinted at the vast stones of the Pentre Ifan cromlech, moody in the greyish light. Jerry nodded and Robert made his way to the crease in front of the ancient monument.

As he took up position, an enormous shadow crossed the landscape. They gazed at the Ekranoplan in awe. The Fairchild fuselage shuddered, the Sukhoi wings glittered, the Corona *Dandelion & Burdock* engines fizzed merrily. Robert was dismayed.

“Almost frictionless!” he gasped.

“There’ll be another over soon,” said Jerry. “Several hundred in fact. We’re transporting the entire population of Wales to India. Just for three months or so. Let them travel around a bit, learn to haggle, try a bhang lassi, maybe a holiday romance...”

“That must have cost a fortune.” Robert blinked.

“An arm and a leg,” sighed Jerry.

“It won’t make them love other cultures,” sniffed Robert. “They may return with even more loathing.”

“Not the point,” said Jerry. “At least they’ll get an opportunity to see what they’re missing. I can’t do everything, you know. I wouldn’t want to even if I could. They have to make their own decisions at some point. Now are you ready, old boy?”

“I am.” Robert adjusted his grip on his bat.

“I’m going to demonstrate a bowling technique suggested to me by a fellah named Morgan. It’s quite radical.”

“Go ahead,” muttered Robert.

Jerry walked to a covered object directly facing the cromlech. Then he pulled the crimson frayed blanket off to reveal a fully loaded 17th Century Spanish cannon. Robert gulped. But he gripped his bat even more tightly and tried to look incorrigible.

“Out for a duck,” whispered Jerry as he flicked open his Zippo lighter and touched the flame to the fuse.



Moorcock the author, Mike the man

by Chris Roberson

Over the years, I've written any number of pieces on Michael Moorcock and his work—reviews, retrospectives, tributes, and such—most of which can probably still be found online in one form or another. As I've said time and again, discovering Moorcock's novels when I was in high school was a crucial step in my development, both as a reader and as a writer. Not only was he one of the biggest influences on me in my formative teenage years, but he continues to influence my work now (it's for this reason, and for many others, that Moorcock is one of the three authors to which my forthcoming *End of the Century* is dedicated, along with Alan Moore and Kim Newman).

But as often as I've written about Moorcock for public consumption, I don't know that I've ever shared in writing my personal experiences with him. Not with Moorcock as a writer, but with "Mike" as a person and, ultimately, as a *friend* (which is something I still can't get my head around, but more on that in a moment).

Years ago, in the summer of 1999, I wrote a lengthy and somewhat rambling review of Moorcock's "Second Ether" trilogy (encompassing *Blood: A Southern Fantasy*, *Fabulous Harbours*, and *War Amongst the Angels*) for the now-departed Clockwork Storybook webzine. In the review, I talked a bit about my first encounter a decade and a half before with *Count Brass* in my high school library, and how that book had led me to Elric, and Cornelius, and Von Bek and Bastable and on and on. I then examined the trilogy at hand, and after delving a brief while into its complexities, mentioned that every time I finished one of Moorcock's novels I was immediately inspired to go and read another, to follow down thematic connections, or Multiversal alternatives, or both. I concluded my review with the following ramble:

As you can see, Moorcock's books are a dazzling maze of character and plot, which once encountered is very hard to leave. Though some might see this a shortcoming, for a reader such as myself it is mother's milk itself. Each new layer of meaning, each new alternative, shifts the meaning and focus of each previous story prismatically, and like a fractal the deeper one goes the more complex things become. I don't think I can ever hope to fit all of it into my head at one time, not unless I quit my job and give up writing and devote my life to the pursuit of all things Moorcock. Which I have no intention of doing. Instead, like an old and distant friend, I'll continue to visit Moorcock on occasion, checking in every now and again, and staying until my head aches, and his ideas have taken over my own. Then I'll stop, and recover, and wait a few months or years for it all to start over again.

A few days after the review appeared online, I received an email from "MM" that contained only five words: "Great review. Thanks. Mike Moorcock."

Of course, jaded cynic that I am, my immediate response was that the email was from one of my friends, pulling some sort of prank. After all, I'd never met Moorcock, so why would he be emailing *me*? So a few moments later, I responded with a quick note, asking a trivial question about a character's name change that had been bugging me. I think my rationale was that if it was one of my friends pulling a prank, this would trip them up, and if it *wasn't*, but really was Moorcock writing me out of the blue, then I'd get an answer to my fanboyish question.

Later that evening "MM" replied, with a genial answer that contained enough detail to convince me that yes, indeed, I was hearing from the *actual* Michael Moorcock. At the time, I was working at Dell Computers in their phone support queue on the night shift, so over the course of that evening and the following days, Moorcock and I maintained a lengthy correspondence, swapping paragraphs-long emails every few hours. Needless to say, my coworkers in the phone bank failed to appreciate the significance, by and large. But for someone that had grown up on Moorcock's books, this was all but unbelievable. To be corresponding with one of my personal idols, to have a *conversation* with him? Aside from the stories I'd posted to the Clockwork Storybook site, I had no published credits to my name, and no "professional" credits at all. But still Moorcock was taking time out, for days on end, to keep up a lengthy discussion with me by email about writing, genre, publishing, et al.

The already all-but-unbelievable circumstance went completely off the rails when, seeing my "@texas.net" email address, Moorcock asked me where in Texas I lived. When I said that I lived in Austin, he replied that I should come down to Bastrop sometime, so he could buy me a drink.

Um, *okay*.

A few weeks later, I headed down to Bastrop. I dragged my old college buddy Matt Sturges along with me, not feeling up to approaching Moorcock's house on my own. He greeted us at the door in overalls, insisted we call him "Mike," and showed us around his house. His wife was away for the weekend, and so we spent all afternoon sitting in his office, him telling us stories about London in the sixties or the private lives of authors we'd only read before, us trying to remain cool and cavalier about the whole thing. At one point, Mike went to the kitchen to bring us a couple of beers—he told us he didn't drink the stuff, but that we were welcome to his wife's supply—and Matt and I turned to each other with identical expressions of awe on our faces. "We're *hanging out* with *Michael Moorcock*," Matt said to me. All I could say was "I know, I *know!*"

Finally, the afternoon wore down to early evening, and Matt and I saw it was time to let Mike get back to work. As we headed out, Mike offered us each copies of *Mother London*, from a box of comps he had by the door. When I mentioned that I was already reading a trade paperback edition of that very book, he just shrugged and said something about this one being signed, and put personal inscriptions in each.

And that was how I met Mike.

I didn't kid myself in that first meeting that Matt and I were anything but acolytes at the feet of the master. Not, of course, that Mike treated us as anything of the kind, but was instead a gracious and generous host. I've talked to any number of other writers and artists over the years who have had similar experiences with Mike, who like me have benefited

from his encouragement and advice. And like many of those others, as the years wear on I've had to gradually come to accept that Mike and I aren't just friendly, but are *friends*, which has been a difficult concept to get my head around.

And while I'm now a proper "Professional Writer," with somewhere near a dozen novels of my own in print or in preparation, I still find it all but impossible to avoid the occasional fanboy moment with Mike, as when I told him over dinner a couple of years ago that I'd read nothing for the previous few months but his novels, some 30 of them in all. I think that caught him a little off guard. (By way of explanation, I should point out that I'd just gone full-time as a writer with my daughter's entry into preschool, and as I'd opined in my review of the Second Ether books years before, the first thing I did was devote myself for a month or more to "all things Moorcock." It seemed only fitting.)

And then there was the time Mike brought his master-forged replica of Stormbringer along to dinner for John Picacio to inspect before starting on his gargantuan project illustrating the Elric stories, and Lou Anders and I descended for a moment into fanboy bliss, taking turns swinging the black blade around in the darkened street in front of an Austin restaurant, quoting lines from the death scene of Elric.

Moorcock the author remains one of the seminal influences on my writing, but I think I may have come to value my experiences with Mike the person even more highly. He truly is one of the treasures of the fantasy field, as writer and as an individual, and I consider myself truly honored to be counted among those he has served to inspire.



Epic Movie

by Catherynne M. Valente

I didn't set out to be a writer. I was raised by a single mother, putting herself through grad school typing up other students' papers for them back when typing skills were rare enough to make this a feasible way to make money. There was a Christmas or two, when I was very young, that we were the recipients of the local Catholic charity tree and presents--you know, the stuff you dump in the bins every other year if you think about it. We were that family. I have memories of staring at dried milk and potato flakes in the store, all we could afford. I stood there in the fluorescent-bathed aisle, longing for a real glass of liquid, frothy milk, and a whole potato, with crisped red skin.

Our lives got better. We moved to California so that Mom could stop typing papers and teach political science at a good university. She finished her doctorate in the sun, with actual glass bottles of organic, cream-top, fresh milk in the fridge, and steaming potatoes wrapped in glittering foil. But I never forgot the taste of Butter Buds and Alpine Aire, the smiling children on their red boxes, how utterly I knew their happiness and healthy smiles were lies. Between those boxes and my mother, her hard life and her very serious lessons on what it means to be a grown-up, how you can never rely on anyone to support you, and

that to be self-sufficient is deadly important for a woman in this world, I sure as hell was never going to do anything as risky and low-income as writing fiction for a living.

It sounds bizarre, given all that, to say that I went to school to study Classics. But I meant to emulate my mother, to teach Greek and Latin to pre-med students until I could get tenure. Then I would be safe, you see. Then I could breathe.

It was a good plan. If not for epic fantasy, I might have managed it.

Now, that's not fair. Epic fantasy didn't ruin my life. It didn't lead me to opium dens where elderly, wizened Chinese men passed redolent copies of Tolkien around a room, or to dice halls where you could lose all your first edition Eddingses in a fast hand of Texas Hold 'Em. But it did teach me that it is practically required for a lost and lonely child without terribly much to eat, growing up without a father, to pursue an impossible and astonishing destiny, to become something wonderful, to strive against odds.

Who was I to argue with the thousands upon thousands of pages of epic fantasy that I ingested over the course of my childhood? Sure, none of those destined children were girls, and they usually ended up having royal pedigrees I certainly didn't, but what is inarguably a cliché does serve a purpose, the purpose most fairy tales serve, the purpose of most stories, in the end: now and again to teach a child that there is a slim, but very real, possibility of a world beyond their own dark and frightening kingdom.

As an adult, however, epic fantasy seems to me to be the most problematic of all fantasy sub-genres, pestilent with the twin orcs of cliché and derivative narratives that flirt with plagiarism. But it is that very danger that makes epic fantasy so relentlessly attractive, so ripe for re-invention every decade or so by a new Michael Moorcock or George R.R. Martin. Like any ruined maid, epic fantasy has all the prettiest clothes and all the filthiest morals. No one wants to bring her home, but everyone's had her, and most have gone back for seconds.

We love it because it's broken. And like Henry Higgins, most of us think we're just the terribly clever kids to fix it. But we always run up against those pretty clothes and those filthy morals, and if you've forgiven this over-extended metaphor, then I'm reasonably sure you'll let me take it just a little further on.

Worldbuilding is the hoop skirt and the hoop earrings and the feathers in the hair and even the corset that makes objects inside it appear larger than they are. We really can't be blamed for falling for this kind of thing. Most SFF authors are nerds at heart, and to list, to categorize, to arrange, to label and annotate is essential nerd-activity. Given an entire universe utterly under our own sway, who among us can resist chronicling the geneologies of ticks on the hindquarters of the King's sister's least favorite dog? More importantly, if Tolkien himself was addicted to appendices, why should we resist? After all, most SFF readers have a healthy geek-streak in them, too. When I'm asked about worldbuilding, the question most often revolves around how much is too much, how do you know when to stop, where is the line between a believable world and an over-determined one. Behind all of these is the assumption that we are all of us battling the forces of crushing pedantry at every stroke of the keyboard.

The answers have to do with the whole idea of worldbuilding itself. The idea that as authors of fantasy, we are in the business of creating worlds with unique rules and attributes which must be communicated to the reader before they could ever hope to understand the story they all showed up to hear. It just isn't so. At best, we create an alternate history to the world we live in, this very one, the one with Butter Buds and kids with poor typing skills and doctorates. Show me a map in the beginning of a doorstopper that isn't a warped version of England or Europe, or if the writer really went nuts, South America. A world where the basic physics of our own do not hold, beyond standard magical tropes such as flight, trans-substantiation, and giant fireballs. Anything that a first-year alchemy student in the 15th century didn't figure his thesis advisor knew how to do and would totally tell him if the Magister didn't have to guard the secret against the grubby hands of plebian society. It's hard enough to find a fantasy world that doesn't strictly hew to the gender roles and economic structure of the 15th century, let alone stretches to such impossibilities as twelve-legged horses and government by anything but hereditary monarchy.

The fact is, there's no such thing as worldbuilding. Not in epic fantasy. What is happening instead is that the author is playing historian to a world very like our own, where technology is replaced by magic and the VIN numbers have been filed off and replaced by long names with extraneous apostrophes. And historians are fighting pedantry with every step, agonizing over how much they know that the average person could never understand, but is just so cool when it's just the cool kids--everyone with enough felt to pad an elbow. The historian's best approach is an easy rule of thumb: assume the reader is basically familiar with how the world works, at least enough to make it from his house to his car in the morning, and provide only as much context as is absolutely necessary for understanding the events at hand, which is usually not terribly much, as everyone groks the basic psych profile at work: wants to stay king/wants to kill king/wants to be king. It's not exactly complex, and knowing who Ethelred the Unready's second cousin was is not key or even necessary to understanding the Battle of Hastings.

The more interesting example, come to think of it, is whether it is necessary to know that the deposed King in question was named Ethelred the Unready. Almost certainly not. However, it provides unbeatable color, interest, and a peek into the mindset of the kind of people who would name their King that and not take his brother aside and ask if he's ever thought of a career in public service. That detail is not necessary, but it is vital, because it pulls a double shift. It conveys information about the culture while at the same time foreshadowing the conclusion of the battle. It's also a little hilarious. Any detail that doesn't do double duty, and preferably triple, should be right out.

Understanding the historian's issues is a double-edged (mystical) sword: it means that so long as everything rolls along basically the way earth history does, (or as we tell ourselves it does, because I've got news for you: even Trajan's family took three generations to go from slave to Roman Emperor and they were famous for the speed of their social mobility) epic fantasy holds together, has gravitas, feels muscular, real, solid. But it also means that high fantasy is the least likely of all sub-genres to depart from the political structure of your average game of RISK, and the familiar ups and downs of earth history become just that: familiar, repeatable, dull, predictable.

There's a solution to that, and it has to do with filthy morals. Remember the over-extended metaphor?

The thing is, once the “world” is “built,” inevitably, people have to live in it. Fortunately, epic fantasy does not require real people. It comes with a roster of easily-insertable archetypes which were only archetypes when Joseph Campbell was talking about them, and have long ago become robots, androids, machines with deceptive human faces. It is your duty to kill them, for the good of your race.

The level of ripping-off that goes on is truly epic, and it's not just Tolkien, who hardly created the most scintillating characters known to man. At this point it's copies of copies, with massive generation loss. Tolkien was at least riffing off (an important distinction, *ripping off* and *riffing off*) of organic, self-replicating folklore. The field today is firmly on the side of the robots, and running Xeroxes of cardboard cutouts. The trouble with the hero with a thousand faces is that once you get four or five of those faces in a room, there are a limited number of stories that can play out, and all of them have been played out before. Again, the double-edged mystical sword strikes for half-damage: archetypal stories are archetypal because they work, way beyond our modern brains' ability to sniff and seek something more rarified. It's reptile-brain territory. Your lizard-brain knows absolutely that when the ambitious duke wearing black is dining with the good king wearing white and the king's kind but soft-hearted son that *shit* is about to *go down*, and it starts hollering with all its cold-blooded, atavistic strength for the good guys to run, to save themselves, fly, you fools!

If you do it right, you can ransom that poor, dumb king with the money you make telling the same damn story over and over, and readers will still be moved to tears, and children will still take strength from it. Such is the power of hard-wired backbrain-narrative, the stories we've been telling since we were squatting around a fire on the savannah. But if you blow it, it's the worst storytelling there is, and frankly, most of us are going to blow it. Backbrain books aren't easy--in their whole careers most writers manage one book that hits the bone and the heart and the DNA so hard readers can't catch a breath. Even the big guy, my boy J.R., got *one*.

So what's the solution? How do you do epic fantasy, which thrives and relies on familiar narrative, neither assuming that you have an IV in the universal vein or getting so wrapped up in your precious creation that you miss Hastings for staring at Ethelred's tapestries?

So there's this kid. Grows up in the middle of nowhere. No father, mother's not around much. Hates the crappy food at home, dreams of something more. One day, the kid turns out to be really good at something, and the world opens up, awful and beautiful and threatening and enticing. Everything the kid thought was desirable and good enough falls away, and something better, something worse, something harder, something brighter, becomes possible.

Is this a story about a boy on a farm who discovers he's meant to wield an ancient sword and restore a fallen kingdom to its rightful ruler? Or is it a story about a girl who gagged on Alpine Aire Dry Skim Milk and dreamed of a quiet tenure until she found box after box of books with ancient swords on the covers? What you know about the farmboy is vague, archetypal, serviceable, generic. What you know about the girl is specific, culturally indicative, a little pathetic, even. It's the same story, the difference is only in the worldbuilding--the boy doesn't live in a world, he lives in a Campbellian holodeck. The girl lives in this world--and to any character ever constructed, the world they live in is this world, just their own world, the only possible world, it doesn't have a fancy name any more than we call our world Gaia, and it cannot, by definition, be filled with the generic and the vague.

The moral is: you get one. Either an archetypical story or a derivative world. For the other, you have to ante up. You use something personal, something that tastes bitter in your mouth, that's hard to write. The most successful series of recent years took all the familiar tropes and changed one thing, whether it's killing main characters like there's a fire sale on tombstones or using the word "fuck" a whole lot. But you have to pick something you can sell as real, true, honest as milk, gritty as all hell, because readers want to both be comforted and feel that they're edgy, erudite consumers of literature. It's either a girl who hates the taste of Butter Buds and loves ancient Greek verbs who finds the sword and deposes the wicked king or it's a farmer's blandly blond son who grows bitter and angry over the lack of mystical weaponry on his land, learning the name of every sheep in the county, until he smothers his family in a night of grief and rage and misplaced destiny. Either one of those is a hell of a lot better than yet another shepherd turning into a king, which is just a Jesus riff, in the end, and I hear he's got a nasty team of copyright lawyers.



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