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***Michael Moorcock: Fiction, Fantasy and the World's Pain*, by Mark Scroggins, and *The Law of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock*, by Jeff Gardiner**

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***Michael Moorcock: Fiction, Fantasy and the World's Pain*, by Mark Scroggins, and
The Law of Chaos: The Multiverse of Michael Moorcock, by Jeff Gardiner**

MICHAEL MOORCOCK: FICTION, FANTASY AND THE WORLD'S PAIN.

Mark Scroggins. McFarland, 2016. 200 pp. ISBN 978-1-4766-6307-4. \$29.95.

THE LAW OF CHAOS: THE MULTIVERSE OF MICHAEL MOORCOCK. Jeff

Gardiner. Headpress (www.worldheadpress.com), 2014. 170pp. ISBN 978-1-909394-19-3. \$19.95 US, £13.99 UK.

DESPISE THE LARGE NUMBER OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION WORKS (many of them highly mythopoeic) created by Michael Moorcock, there has been relatively little academic attention paid to his work. Other than reviews, bibliographies, and interviews, the few academic articles about Moorcock seem to be limited to journals like *Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Studies*, and even then are frequently focused only on a single work. These two books, offering overviews of Moorcock's entire *oeuvre* up to 2016, provide a couple of much-needed entry points for academic study of this author.

The volume from popular publisher McFarland, as a part of their "Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy" series, is more academic, with an author who is a professor of English at Florida Atlantic University. The smaller book is from an independent publisher, and written by a fiction writer who has personal contact with Moorcock, so it has a somewhat different focus but covers much of the same ground and is in some ways more detailed in its approach.

Mark Scroggins has organized his McFarland book to follow Moorcock's career roughly chronologically, which fortuitously allows for grouping his works thematically as well. This approach demonstrates the growth of Moorcock's skill and sophistication as a writer over time, showing how his attention during various phases of his life turned to different themes, genres, and characters.

As possibly Moorcock's most well-known character is Elric of Melniboné, Scroggins wisely begins his examination of Moorcock's themes and characters with the concept of the Eternal Champion, of whom Elric is but one manifestation. This concept expands to include other key Moorcock motifs such as the Multiverse and the Cosmic Balance, which return again and again throughout his works. This chapter also sets Elric and the Champion within the context of Moorcock's early writing career, and delineates the influences of such prototypical sword-and-sorcery heroes such as Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian and Edgar Rice Burroughs's John Carter of Mars (and less obviously, Poul Anderson's *Three Hearts and Three Lions* and *The Broken Sword*), while also demonstrating the anti-influence of Tolkien.

The second chapter shifts gears and focusses instead on Moorcock's participation in the British avant-garde "New Wave" of SF, and his creation of

the psychedelic Jerry Cornelius stories. Scroggins thinks highly of the original Cornelius tetralogy, comparing the writing to Proust and Joyce; he also notes its influence on later works, such as stories by other SF writers, and graphic novels by Mobius and Bryan Talbot. He shows that despite the vast difference of style, genre, characterization, setting, and time period, Cornelius can also be considered yet another aspect of the Eternal Champion.

Scroggins continues by returning to Moorcock's fantasy works and multiverse novels, discussing the Corum and Runestaff series; the steampunk fantasies featuring Oswald Bastable, which Scroggins points out were influenced by E. Nesbitt and H.G. Wells; the far-future Dancers at the End of Time series, which he compares to the novels of Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams; and *Gloriana*, an homage to Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* and Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*.

The next phase of Moorcock's literary output sees him turning to real-world matters, and Scroggins examines works like *Breakfast in the Ruins*, *The Brothel in Rosenstrasse*, *Mother London*, and the Colonel Pyat novels. He shows Moorcock in the 1980s and 90s turning to more realistic fiction, although many of these novels feature walk-ons by characters from various of his fantasy series, which tie them to his multiverse, albeit tenuously.

After that phase, Moorcock returned to fantasy and expanded the mythos of the Eternal Champion with novels longer and more complex than his early pulp-era-inspired Elric books. He also developed more separate milieus within his multiverse, especially one centered around the Von Bek family and their relationship to the Holy Grail, and one rather strange one centered in a place between worlds, called the Second Ether. During the chapter "Consolidating the Multiverse," Scroggins not only describes Moorcock's new writings in this area, but also goes into the publishing history of various attempts to collect all the multiverse stories and novels, most notably by Millennium Books in the U.K. and White Wolf in the U.S. He also looks at how the many different variants of Moorcock characters relate to each other (sometimes well, sometimes poorly), and shows how the author's revisions to some of his very early works made adjustments to character names in order to place them within the multiverse framework.

Rounding out the book are relatively brief comments about Moorcock's ventures into other media: specifically, rock music, with his own band The Deep Fix and his collaborations with Hawkwind and others; and graphic novels, in collaboration with artists like Walter Simonson. There is also mention of writers and artists who have publicly acknowledged the influence of Moorcock on their work.

Jeff Gardiner's *The Law of Chaos* is likely to be less well known, and possibly unknown to anyone not engaged in serious Moorcock research; but it contains a wealth of information valuable to anyone interested in Moorcock's life and work. In fact, Scroggins's acknowledgments include gratitude to previous works on Moorcock, including that of Gardiner, so it is no surprise that the two books have similar structures and scopes.

Gardiner organizes his material by characters and series, in order to facilitate one of his aims for this book, to help an unfamiliar reader make sense of the vast array of Moorcock's fictional worlds, and to point out entry points into this multiverse. Within that framework he progresses chronologically, beginning with Elric and the Eternal Champion cycle and continuing through the years as Moorcock's interests and characters evolve. Whether Scroggins consciously emulated this approach, or merely reasoned that it was a logical way to present the material, the result is a pleasing similarity between the two books.

Other similarities include identifying Moorcock's influences, both literary antecedents and cultural milieus, and the use of external sources to illuminate historical contexts. Both books also include fairly complete lists of Moorcock's novels, organized by series or character.

The differences, however, are noticeable. Where Scroggins is academic, with an index and 22 pages of endnotes and bibliography, Gardiner is more informal, with no index, only a short list of suggested references, and a distinct lack of citations for many of the quotes he uses in the body of the text. Gardiner makes up for this with a lot of other supplementary material, including three pieces by Moorcock himself (an introduction, a personal letter, and responses to interview questions), an art gallery (mostly book covers, and most of the artists uncredited) and an appendix discussing Moorcock's lyrics to a few Hawkwind songs.

Oddly enough for a shorter book (137 pages of primary material, as opposed to 169 for Scroggins), Gardiner supplies a lot more biographical detail, especially about Moorcock's early life, and about his involvement with *New Worlds*. Gardiner's discussions of various books and characters go into a lot more detail about plot and symbolism, providing possibilities for further research and analysis. Gardiner also takes more opportunity to demonstrate connections between all of Moorcock's different series, mentioning crossover characters, common themes, and other points of intersection.

Gardiner also includes a lot of direct quotes from Moorcock himself, which sometimes shed light and sometimes (like many of his works) just seem cryptic and allusive. Similarly, Moorcock's answers to the interview questions (presumably posed by Gardiner, but that is not explicitly stated) are sometimes direct and sometimes diverted to irrelevant comments. But no matter what one

makes of these comments, the presence of Moorcock's own thoughts and words adds considerable weight to this volume.

On the whole, these two books are welcome additions to the study of mythopoeic fantasy. They both function well as introductions to Moorcock's life and works, as well as his predecessors and successors. For those who are already fans of this author, there will be plenty of details and insights that would be valuable even to experienced readers. A great benefit to researchers for further study of Moorcock are the frequent mentions of the various sources and influences on many of the works discussed (and the extensive citations in Scroggins), as well as historical perspective of what was going on in the fantasy field, the publishing industry, and the world in general in all the phases of Moorcock's writing career.

—David L. Emerson



MYTH-BUILDING IN MODERN MEDIA: THE ROLE OF THE MYTHARC IN IMAGINED WORLDS. A.J. Black. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2020, 213 p. ISBN: 978-1476675633. \$39.95.

FROM THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE (MCU) to the recent influx of new *Star Wars* content, some of the most visible texts in contemporary popular culture reveal a certain feature in common—an overarching narrative arc that, across various installments, both connects and informs a wide variety of characters, events, and settings through some organizing mythos. In his new book *Myth-Building in Modern Media: The Role of the Mytharc in Imagined Worlds*, author A.J. Black calls this phenomenon the “mytharc,” taking up a term popularized (and possibly even introduced) by fans of the television show *The X-Files* during the 1990s. The mytharc, Black maintains, is distinct both from the chronological progression of prequel to sequel, and also from stories that just so happen to be set in a shared secondary world. Unlike simply following the same characters into new situations or revisiting a particular secondary world to see the changes time has wrought there, an arc “directly continues narrative beats and character points” (Black 4), providing an overarching mythos for the television show, film franchise, or series in question. To Black, this difference is important because arcs enable us to tell, recognize, and enjoy stories that provide a form of escapism while simultaneously inviting us to ask questions about who we are as human beings. And, to this end, *Myth-Building in Modern Media* examines several examples of the mytharc in popular culture through a quest-like structure of its own.