

Issue Four | Spring 1995

Game reviews

Elric!

(Chaosium Inc; 160 pages; \$19.95)

Ken St Andre's Stormbringer rolegame was first published in 1981. Those who liked it admired the way it took the rules of RuneQuest and streamlined them. A great innovation at the time was the magic system. Magical effects were brought about through the agency of elementals and bound demons, rather like the sandestins in Jack Vance's novels Lyonesse and Rhialto the Marvellous. This encouraged a story-led approach, since the demons were characters in their own right who often could not or would not achieve the exact same magical effect every time.

Fourteen years on, and the law of diminishing returns must have made Stormbringer's appeal look rather tarnished from the viewpoint of Chaosium's accountants. A new edition would have been justified. Instead we get a new game: Elric. (I'm going drop the exclamation mark here, as the authors themselves often do, to avoid the appearance of hysteria.)

Stormbringer is hardly mentioned in Elric, and we are often reminded that it is not a re-write but a whole new game. But the fact is there are many features carried over from the earlier game, the only difference being that they've been complexified. William Church's charming map has been replaced by a more grotty (supposedly "gothic") version. And, most regrettable of all, they've bunged in a list of spells. Breath of Life, Make Whole, Undo Magic... stuff like that.

I'll tell you what this looks like. It looks like a variant of Stormbringer that someone has developed for their own campaign over a number of years. A variant with more detailed combat, more spells, more magic items. But in this case more is less. My advice, if you're at all interested in the Elric saga, is to ignore this game just as you should ignore Moorcock's more recent additions to the series. And if you see an old copy of Stormbringer going second-hand, snap it up. It's a true classic.

Inspiration

(Oxford Games Ltd; £12.95)

Here's a marvellous little gem of a game. Players take turns drawing cards on which a question and answer are written. For example: "What is the diametre of a basketball ring?" (eighteen inches) or "Who was the first athlete to be featured on a stamp?" (Hercules). The player reads out only the answer and the other players then each devise a plausible question, write it down, and hand it to the first player to read out. Everyone then has to decide which they think is the question on the card. You score points, in the form of Muse cards, for getting it right or if someone else was fooled by your question.

Split your sides laughing and see those creative juices flow out! A good 'un.

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