

WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



THE WARPSTONE INTERVIEW

MARC GASCOIGNE

Questions by John Foody

Marc Gascoigne is in charge of the Black Library, and so we thought we would throw a few questions at him. This is the full text of the interview to be found in Warpstone issue 18. The Black Library can be found at www.blacklibrary.co.uk

Could you give me a brief bit of background about yourself? What position you hold in the Black Library etc.

I joined Games Workshop (the first time) in 1984, prior to the merger with Citadel. I had had some experience of game writing after starting the fanzine Dragon Lords with two friends, and was immediately set to work writing the Judge Dredd roleplaying game. I also worked on a bunch of other rpg titles, helped develop a bunch of boardgames and ran White Dwarf's Call of Cthulhu column. Then I went away from Games Workshop for ten years. Wrote and edited kids books, ran the Fighting Fantasy line for Steve Jackson & Ian Livingstone, wrote some Shadowrun, Earthdawn and Paranoia stuff. In 1997, I rejoined Games Workshop to help set up the Black Library imprint. Originally it was myself as editor and designer, boss Andy Jones and our admin queen Judy. Now I'm in charge of the department, overseeing a team of five editors and designers, plus a clutch of admin and accounts staff, and of course a whole host of freelance writers and artists.

How successful has the Black Library been? How many languages have the novels been translated into?

Startlingly successful, as it happens. Games Workshop had focused purely on games for so long that it was always going to be a gamble re-entering the fiction market, but it's paid off very well. Our first line, the Inferno fiction anthology, was designed specifically to find and encourage new writers and artists, both with fiction and comic strip. That did its job well, thus laying the foundations for first Warhammer Monthly comic and now the novel line. Even so, when we launched the new novel range we planned pretty modestly. We thought that we would perhaps print ten thousand copies of a title and be happy to sell half that before deleting it. Two years in, our first titles have sold over fifty thousand copies worldwide, and show no sign of fading. Of course, such success presents its own problems, such as keeping more and more titles in print to meet demand - but I'd rather have that problem than the books not selling enough :-)

All our novels are available in regular bookstores as well as Games Workshop stores. In the USA and Australia, huge mainstream publisher Simon & Schuster takes them into bookstores. To date we have translated editions on shelves in Germany, Spain, Poland, Czech Republic and Finland, and we're finalising details in at least three other countries at the moment. It was great to hear from William King that he had wandered into his local bookstore in Prague, where he lives, to find the Czech edition of Trollslayer at #1 in the SF/Fantasy charts!

Is there a policy of trying to have "official" gameworlds or are you happy for Black Library fiction to disagree with other books and the other game

background? Is there any communication between Black Library and the game authors?

Well, the Black Library office is in the main Games Workshop headquarters building in Nottingham, and my desk is perhaps fifty yards from those of the Warhammer and 40K developers... Also, some of that team, such as Gav Thorpe, Andy Chambers and new game developer Graham McNeill continue to write fiction for us. So no, no links at all :-)
Such facetiousness aside, well, we have two main aims when preparing fiction for publication. Obviously, it must be written and edited to a certain standard. But it must also fit in with both the spirit and the detail of the Warhammer world, and not contradict the current version of the tabletop game. If most of the details were wrong we'd just confuse all of our readers.

Sometimes that's not straightforward. Millions of words of background, both core and peripheral, have been printed by Games Workshop over the decades. There have been changes in the focus of such material too, from the roleplaying game to the tabletop wargame, that have produced minor inconsistencies. Occasionally we have to make a judgement call as to which source of a detail to treat as the truth. Now and then we might even have to decide that a previously mentioned incident was misreported, a myth. But, well, it is all meant to be set in a savage fantasy world where mankind huddles in tiny pockets of civilisation and communications are poor...

How much say does the Black Library have in an author's work?

As implied above, just like any other publisher we advise our authors on all aspects of their work - but of course it's then up to them to write the book, in their style and with their own particular imagination. We also try to develop authors so they better understand what we're looking for, in terms of content, theme and so on, so we have to provide less and less guidance the more they work for us. Let's face it, if we have to write the books for them we're not doing our jobs as editors very well.

Why did Games Workshop abandon the idea of publishing for so long?

Well, I wasn't working for the company at that time, but my take is that we were perhaps a little distracted by our explosion of success as a games company. At that time, our tabletop games went through the roof, sales wise, and as a result all our attention went onto developing the core range. So I suspect we took our eye off the ball with fiction publishing, and concentrated on the area that was demanding most of our attention. It wasn't until we had a stable, mature market for our games and more especially the worlds in which they were set, that we realised we should be exploring those worlds through fiction and comics as well. And judging by the success of the Black Library's products, it was the right time to return!

Are we likely to see authors graduating from Inferno! to novels?

We already are. Dan Abnett, William King, Gordon Rennie, Gav Thorpe and (coming soon) Graham McNeill all had short fiction published in Inferno! long before graduating to the novel range. We have several other regular contributors to Inferno! who we are discussing longer work with as well. In fact, from our point of view we regard Inferno! as a fertile training ground for writers and artists. Now and then we have folk approach us, keen to write a novel. While we are happy to consider proposals from anyone, we tend to suggest that they try an Inferno! short first, if only so we can develop a good working relationship with them before diving into a far larger project. Several Inferno! stories have effectively been pilot episodes leading into longer works, and in the future you will also see Inferno! stories which accompany new novels, extra adventures that link into a novel without being just an excerpt from the book itself.

Have there been any concerns raised over the violence in Black Library publications, either from inside Games Workshop or from the public? Is it something considered when looking at submissions?

What have you heard :-)
No, we haven't heard any complaints from people about "violence", or what I presume you actually mean, "excessive violence". Ultimately, we

are writing war stories aimed at people aged fourteen to adult, so there will be some rough stuff - it does what it says on the tin! We operate an informal code of standards that has developed over the years, tempered by our own moral judgements. We don't "sanitise" the nastier side of battle, but we're not in the business of publish exploitative fiction without an underlying emotional resonance. One of our most popular, and in the department most favourite, titles is Dan Abnett's Necropolis, the saga of a Stalingrad-like siege from Warhammer 40,000. During the course of the book many characters die, but because Dan has taken the trouble to make us like them, identify with them, feel for them, their deaths become far more sudden and far more shocking. His writing makes us care for these poor soldiers facing indomitable odds, swept away in the awful tide of war. In terms of looking at submissions, what is far more pertinent is that we don't accept glorified "battle reports". In our army books and codices, we feature plenty of snippets of fiction designed to illustrate a particular rules point or scenario. We get too many of those turning up in the guise of stories, but without proper plot, setting and characters we will always reject them.

Is there any author you would personally like to see write for the Black Library?

Unfortunately, Fritz Leiber is dead, so... Him aside, well, it would obviously be tremendous to have Kim Newman back on board with some more Genevieve stories, but he's some way out of our price range these days, he tells me, so that's probably not an option. Him aside, well, what I would really like to read is an author, any author, who can really do justice to Space Marines, truly bring to life their characters as almost far-future Arthurian knights, human but not human, driven by the knowledge that they are the few, the last hope for humanity's defence. Beyond that, I like to be surprised by the quality of what our authors, both well-known names and newcomers, present us with, and I'm sure such delights will continue to arrive.

What are the future plans for the Black Library?

Where to start, where to start...

Firstly, of course, we want to keep on doing what we are doing: releasing a monthly comic, a bi-monthly fiction anthology, tons of novels and several more graphic novel collections and art books and limited edition models and t-shirts and posters and... The next big step will October 2001, when we ramp up novel production to two books per month. To ease in gently, we will be re-issuing a selection of the old Games Workshop/Boxtree novels, starting with Jack (Kim Newman) Yeovil's Drachenfels. That means we'll have one Warhammer and one 40K novel appearing each month, for the foreseeable future. We have a bunch of new series starting, including a couple of dark fantasy lines, as well as the ongoing adventures of favourites like Gaunt's Ghosts and Gotrek & Felix.

Our art book range is growing all the time; hot on the heels of the big Inquis Exterminatus collection and the Jes Goodwin sketchbook The Gothic & the Eldritch, we have John Blanche's original sketches for the Inquisitor game, and then a look at the colour art of Warhammer 40K, and have a big Warhammer fantasy title planned for mid-2002 as well. There are mutterings about colour comics, art prints, background books, and so much more. We've only just started.

PS, anyone interested in submitting Warhammer fiction to Inferno! should in the first instance check out the guides on our [website](#). We have two basic rules: be true to the spirit and feel of Warhammer, and be any good :-)