

# The Hyborian Review

Volume 4, Number 2.

July 31, 1998

*In partial fulfillment of REHupa requirements*

*Produced by Garret Romaine*

## Notes from a frenzied situation...

Things are accelerating nicely right now. I'm comfortable with my Internet column every two months, and I placed a "Career Enhancement" piece in the local computer magazine. And I finally broke through to a national PC magazine -- PC Today has assigned me 4,000 words at 30 cents per word for mid-August.

I couldn't help thinking of Robert E. Howard when I got the contract for 30 cents a word. Technical journalism is a grind-it-out, cut 'n paste world where the words add up quickly, almost mindlessly. To craft the mystical worlds and compelling characters Howard worked out for ½ a penny a word...and then not get paid to boot...

I've missed PulpCon yet again...Ohio in July is just too far away. I was there in spirit, however.

- Garret Romaine

## **Purpose Statement:**

This publication is dedicated to the most enduringly popular character ever produced by Robert E. Howard.

While other characters and ideas will pop up from time to time, the main thrust of this publication is to document the intricacies of a barbarian's barbarian, Conan of Cimmeria.

Comics, movies, magazines, Internet, and other resources will be discussed. And of course -- when time permits -- mailing comments...

## Hero with a single face

by Garret Romaine

The first thought that popped into my head when I started with this essay was the classic line from Tina Turner, of all people: "We don't need another hero..."

The rest of the lyrics were pretty forgettable -- I don't have the courage to reprint them here. I can never get over the difference between *The Road Warrior* and *Thunderdome*. But the refrain kept banging around my cranium. Why would anyone think like that? Who wouldn't want a hero at almost any time? Don't we *always* need another hero? One more ought to do it...

The answer, perhaps, is that we have plenty of heroes. Our inventory includes sports heroes that hit home runs or throw smoke on a hot August night. We have quarterbacks that think on their feet and change plays while their breath heaves out in great gasps on a cold November morning. We have generals that win wars, and ordinary people that save lives, even while losing their own.

In our Internet connected, film-at-11 world, we are forced a never-ending gallery of faces, and left to our own wits to sort out which ones merit another glance and which ones are just milking their 15 minutes.

Perhaps the reason we don't need another hero is that we don't trust them anymore. After all, some have been awfully human lately. They get in trouble with the law, they slap their wife around or they can't keep their pants on. They fall into the illicit vice, kinky sex trap, searching desperately for better thrills and darker secrets. They flaunt their notoriety until they have to go down, and we hate them for that even while we jeer and laugh.

But whenever the next rocket-armed teenaged pitcher or seven-foot thunder dunking center comes on the scene, we prepare our hero-worship genetic code all over again. Be it a young handsome politician who can feel our pain, or an earnest young singer in a rock 'n roll band, we seem to lurch from hero to hero, until we have one a day, like a vitamin.

We chew them up and spit them out, as though they were fuel for our psychic engine. The reality is that we need heroes by the six-pack, and don't hold the chips and dip.

All of which leads me first, to Joseph Campbell, and second, to Robert E. Howard. I'd like to look at the heroes Campbell had in mind, and juxtapose that vision with Howard's most successful commercial creation, Conan of Cimmeria.

## **Campbell and The Hero**

The second paragraph in Campbell's seminal work, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, explains how we are predisposed to indulge in a good mythical hero story over and over again...

"Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth." (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, page 3)

Our mythical heroes are simpler than the real-life dramas, of course; who could think up all the entanglements of the O.J. trial or Bill Clinton vs. Monica Lewinsky? What empowers fiction in the face of its falsehood is its duty to tell some bigger story, to illustrate some example, at the expense of the truth. Whether it be a simple, straightforward fable or an intricate Hollywood movie, when done right, a good hero myth can be timeless in its message.

## **Playing to the Audience**

Every communicator, whether the end product be computer manuals or a TV broadcast, has to know the audience to be effective. Ancient storytellers were no exception. The audiences of the myth tellers helped shape the message they heard with their hoots and catcalls or quiet murmurs and rapt attention. It was easy back then to determine what was "selling" and what was falling flat. You could probably make a case that the ancient myth teller was more tuned into his audience than any 20th century novelist with spreadsheets, polling data, and trends analysis.

And what worked best? A good, meaty adventure, a hopeless quest, a lost-cause journey to the gates of Hell and back! Hero tales that seem to ennoble us all are the positive side of what is, after all, a tall tale or whopper. To get away with stretching the truth, ancient myth-tellers soon must have learned that if there was a positive message in there, parents would tell their children the myth; uncles would tell aunts, and the tale, with its message, would spread. Lacking a good message, the tale is reduced to a long joke or idle gossip. But when parents can use it to instruct their children, or when priests can use the example to illustrate points to the faithful, then a myth derives more power. Such were the stories that transcended their times and live on in some form today.

Still, active audience participation doesn't tell the whole story behind what Campbell called the "monomyth." Through cross-pollination in the fields of dream analysis, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, psychology, mythology and more, Campbell reminded that there was something deep-rooted in man's need to surround himself with symbols of his struggle with life and the gods. Those symbols speak to the range of human emotions and the fears and paranoias that motivate our basic instincts, even if we ourselves don't always understand them.

But let's bring Howard in here. If Campbell could easily decipher the myths of the past, what of the stories of the pulps that became popular before he published *Faces*? Were these some kind of new literature, re-purposed and freed to tell stories without making points?

Hardly; Howard had several points in mind, as we all know. He believed, for example, that all civilizations must fall, because barbarism is the natural state of man. Those themes propelled his writing career, flavored nearly every story, and gave him a unique consistency. It also kept him from fitting into Campbell's theories. For when looking at Conan of Cimmeria, it soon becomes clear that while this barbarian's many stories occasionally follow some Campbellian tradition, taken on the whole, they are not easily inserted into the monomyth.

For the rest of this essay, I'd like to look at the different "classical" stages of the hero story of Campbell vs. the way Howard constructed Conan's life and story.

First, a handy pocket guide of the various pieces of the monomyth:

### **DEPARTURE**

1. The Call to Adventure
2. Refusal of the Call
3. Supernatural Aid
4. The Crossing of the First Threshold
5. The Belly of the Whale

### **INITIATION**

6. The Road of Trials
7. The Meeting with the Goddess
8. Woman as the Temptress
9. Atonement with the Father
10. Apotheosis
11. The Ultimate Boon

### **RETURN**

12. Refusal of the Return
13. The Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16. Master of the Two Worlds
17. Freedom to Live

## **1. Call to Adventure**

Writes Campbell: "This first stage of the mythological journey -- which we have designated the 'call to adventure' -- signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground; beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight. The hero can go forth of his own volition to accomplish the adventure...or he may be carried or sent abroad...The adventure may begin as a mere blunder, or still again, one may be only casually strong, when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye..." (p. 58)

What you don't see fitting in here is Conan's yearning to leave the squalid villages of Cimmeria for the glimmering southern civilizations. Howard dwells but little on Conan's reason for leaving, assigning it to a predestined wanderlust that gripped but few of his fellow Cimmerians. That it made Conan interesting and unique was enough. But it most certainly was not through a classic call to adventure. Destiny didn't choose him; he liked what he briefly saw during the looting of Vanarium and wanted more. His motivations were the basest and most elementary; better work, softer women, more treasure. There was nothing spiritual or mythical about it.

## **2. Refusal of the Call**

Little is as obvious to a reader or movie viewer as the foregone conclusion that the hero is going to put up some lame-ass excuse as to why he shouldn't go on a quest or journey, but go on it anyway. Otherwise, why are we here? Even Luke Skywalker tried to back out on Obi-Wan. And of course, events always propel the hero forward.

Think of it as a sales opportunity for the storyteller or author to cement the deal, set the hook, or close the sale. To overcome the customer's urge to walk out on the movie, or close the book, the story gets past the objection -- "Why do I care?" -- by making sure the audience understands all the wheels that are in motion.

For Conan, again, the story is different. He didn't refuse the call; after the sack of Vanarium, he simply packed up and left. Howard burdened him with no teenage love interest, no crying Mom to wave good-bye, and no Father to hand off a last-ditch piece of advice.

Conan did go back to Cimmeria on at least a couple of occasions, but was that to refuse the call of adventure? Hardly. Conan was no outcast or banished criminal. He left on his own volition and was free to return as he wished. It wasn't like the adventures of his life paused when he came home. There were plenty of "Conanesque" situations when he was on Cimmerian soil.

Indeed, for Conan to refuse the call would be a bit out of character. He's more likely to go looking for a call, to figure out how to play off both sides with him in the middle.

## **3. Supernatural Aid**

Here is a monomyth staple that Howard did actually employ periodically. For at this point, the hero who is on his way will require a protective amulet, potion, or spell for additional weaponry of righteousness against the evil foe.

Such Writing 101 plot devices often drop sword and sorcery offerings into a lamentable "Dungeons and Dragons" netherworld where every spell has a counterspell and every weapon has a protection. In such worlds, wizards run amok, gods and deities form a pantheon of competing interests, and the outcome depends more on the whims of a Dungeon Master than on any well-conceived purpose. It can be the worst kind of sword and sorcery pablum, having more to do with intricacy for the sake of itself than on any message or moral. The best most of these stories can do is boil down to a "good vs. evil" or "love conquers all" resolution.

Here is what begins to set the Tor novels apart from Howard once and for all. Under the hand of paladin penmen such as Leonard Carpenter, Roland Green, and even L. Sprague de Camp, Conan consistently picked up magical weapons, protective amulets, or potent antidotes as needed. Yet in Howard's stories, especially early in his career, young Conan needed no such protections to start a tale. True, in *Tower of the Elephant*, there was supernatural aid in getting Conan **out** of a jam. But that's different...

Not that Howard didn't enlist the aid of the supernatural from time to time. The very first Conan tale, *The Phoenix on the Sword*, gave us a long-dead priest and an arcane symbol scratched on the king's steel. In *Beyond the Black Border*, Conan scratches the sign of Jhebbal Sog, another symbol of magical importance. This list is actually quite long; but it's a staple of the genre as well as an ancient plot device.

#### 4. The Crossing of the First Threshold

Just as there is a gate to the Garden of Eden, there is a logical gate to the rest of the classic hero story. To truly embrace the concept of the quest and reach the end of the first part of the yarn, the audience requires some kind of transition. There came a time in the movie *Star Wars* when it was no longer realistic to think of Luke Skywalker in terms of the young ranch-hand on a god-forsaken planet far, far away from the Rebellion. But where, exactly, was that point?

Says Campbell, "With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Beyond [the gate] is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe." (p. 77)

In *Red Nails*, Conan and Valeria pass through the jungle, a known world for them, and into the desert in order to reach the walled city. The threshold guardian could be thought of as the reptile they poisoned.

Yet *Red Nails* is hardly a true, 100% dead-on monomyth story. Conan has no reluctance to follow Valeria wherever she may flee; he undergoes no transformation, for he is exactly what he was when the bloody battle ends as he was going in; and he has few other brushes with Campbell's standard story devices. There are images and points of conjecture galore; anyone who read Rusty Burke's immortal *Seanchai 52*, with its archetypal analysis of the tale, will confirm that there are Jungian and Campbellian symbolism galore in the story. But it is not a monomyth tale from start to finish without an awful lot of handwaving and mumbling.

Sometimes it seemed as though Howard tossed in monsters, serpents, and other guardians almost as an afterthought. Whenever the drama flagged, he'd conjure up another obstacle. But these weren't true guardians of any zone of power or extra enlightenment. They were simply plot devices in most cases, guarding, to be sure, but mostly guarding the next page of a frantically-plotted story from being one bit boring.

#### 5. The Belly of the Whale

Jonas is, by far, the most famous case of being swallowed up by a whale. But he was hardly the first human to undergo such an indignity. Campbell found parallels in story after story, told by tribes separated by thousands of miles. He recites various similar epics - Zulu, Eskimo, Greek, Irish and Hawaiian stories along the same lines.

The image is a powerful one -- Campbell says the hero, "instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died." (p. 90)

Where, though, was Conan ever born again? Perhaps this phase can take place only once in a hero's tale. Didn't Conan actually re-invent himself several times, like any good '90's knowledge worker might? He went from wanderer to thief, to fighter, to soldier; to officer, commander, general, and finally to King.

Notice that L. Sprague de Camp fell into the Campbellian hero rut much more closely, as did the movie *Conan the Barbarian*. In de Camp's Conan story *The Thing in the Crypt*, Conan enters the crypt as a slave on the run from wolves, but after battling the awakened skeleton, which we can think of as a guardian, Conan emerges from the crypt with a sword and a smile. He has passed the first threshold. Later in the movie he is beat up and bloodied, nailed to a cross, and only escapes death narrowly -- this is the belly of the whale.

In the classic hero myth, the idea of self-annihilation, of being born again, completes the first third of the hero tale. The departure is by now complete. For Luke Skywalker, it might be argued the Death Star was a guardian to the zone of empowerment, and that the scene in the tunnel in movie #2, where he cuts off the head of his dark side, was the self-annihilation check-point. Regardless, next comes *Initiation*.

#### 6. The Road of Trials

Campbell kicks off the initiation phase with a reminder that this is often the reader's favorite part of the tale. Here's where the hero is hardened and tempered like raw steel to become the warrior. "It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals," says Campbell. (p. 97)

Think here of some of the various Hollywood heroes and the body of their work. Bruce Willis seems to get beat to a pulp in many of his "heroic" movies (I use the term loosely). Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* would often get shot at and thumped on; ditto for Sylvester Stallone, be he in *Rambo* or *Rocky* garb. This is all part of the passage any good hero endures. In fact, the better the hero, the more savage the beating they take.

For Conan of Cimmeria, whose entire life was a series of tests, the initiation never seemed to end. And that's a clue that Conan was not of the monomyth; for he never really graduated from this phase of the journey. He crossed many thresholds, saw the belly of many a whale, and yet continued to strive, to slay. Even as King of Cimmeria, he fought battles and won wars.

The only full-length Conan tale, *The Hour of the Dragon*, carried very few parallels with a Campbell tale. Oh, there was the call to adventure, and an annihilation scene where the stand-in died. But missing was the next series of required steps, as well as the completed transformation at the end. Howard never transformed Conan into a mystic, mage, or wizard; he never gathered power other than that which fit into his sword hand. Conan as a character survives because he can easily be molded into many parts of the monomyth, but Howard wasn't interested in doing so.

## 7. The Meeting with the Goddess

Now that the hero tale is progressing well, with victories and triumphs left and right, it is time to slow him down. What better way than to introduce a woman into the mix? What handsome hero can resist the beauty of a goddess? Bring on the babes!

Let Campbell start this off:

"The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World. This is the crisis at the nadir, the zenith, or at the uttermost edge of the earth, the at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart." (p. 109)

Campbell goes on and on here; how such a goddess, in most stories, is an "incarnation of the promise of perfection...the 'good' mother -- young and beautiful -- who was known to us, and even tasted, in the remotest past." Or, conversely, she can be absent, unattainable, vindictive and "the death of everything that dies." (p. 114) Either way, she is usually unforgettable.

In Conan's travels, he met up with a goddess or two. Atali, the *Frost-Giant's Daughter*, comes to mind. Belit was acclaimed a goddess by those who saw her mating dance. Or, a woman might have claimed she was a goddess, as in Muriela's attempted deception in *Jewels of Gwandhur*. Conan often dallies with queens and warrior-wenches, teams with a few of the better ones, and almost always comes out the better for the meeting. Indeed, Conan was often spared the indignity of the next step...

## 8. Woman as the Temptress

Anyone as ruggedly handsome as Conan will always have occasional issues with the female sex. Howard, who practically embodied the image of a man with female problems (he cared for a sick mother while dating a headstrong female) tossed Conan into the breach countless times. But he wasn't always tempted. Consider the story *The Vale of Lost Women*. He treated Livia as if she mattered little to him, spurning her offer to trade sex for escape with a laugh.

Again, the monomyth parallel breaks down at a crucial point. Women tempted Conan, but he was no slave to them. Conan was beside himself with lust more than once, certainly, but not continually. The early Conan story *Tower of the Elephant* had no female to speak of. Ditto for *God in the Bowl*, or especially *Beyond the Black River*. Howard could spin his tales without the benefit of a female lead, and thus could afford Conan's chivalrous attitude that forbade the ravishing of the weak and helpless, no matter how willing.

Campbell is more apt to expand on these themes than I am; I was happier with the trials than with the love interest. Says he: "The mystical marriage (step 7) with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master." (p. 120) The problem here is that Campbell now brings in the Oedipus Complex, Hamlet, and additional psychodrama that rings less true for Conan than for Odysseus or Luke Skywalker.

## 9. Atonement with the Father

If we're going to spend so much time with the maternal side of the hero's makeup, we might as well balance things out with a swipe at dear old Dad. In *Star Wars*, Luke nears the end of the state of confusion over his parentage when he hears the immortal words, "Luke, I am your father." This brings the youth more pain and torment, and reveals the worst of what Campbell calls the "ogre aspect" of the father. Give George Lucas credit here; Darth Vader has to be at the top of most of our lists for a tough father.

But what does any of this have to do with the hero's adventure? It's all wrapped up in psychological mumbo jumbo, actually -- a reflex of the victim's own ego, derived from the nursery scene where we fight with Dad over Mom.

Since Conan never dealt much with his father, we have to extrapolate his feelings about Cimmeria and his extended family to make much sense of this.

There is a time in *Treasure of Trancos* when Conan pops in unawares and it is suggested that he has made friends with the Picts. I don't have the original texts, so I don't know for sure if de Camp added this. But it sounds vaguely Howardian when Conan snarls that to have suggested such an idea to one of his wilder brethren might have cost the man a head. The passage reveals that Conan does periodically think about where he might stand with the Cimmerians he left behind.

Still, these are some of the weakest connections yet to the monomyth ideal, and it gets worse. For we are leaving the standard monomyth far, far behind when we look further at Conan.

## 10. Apotheosis

Here is where the hero-adventure myth has lost Conan completely. At apotheosis, the Campbellian hero enters a "divine state which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance." (p. 151) This is a Buddha-state, where the hero is free of all fear and beyond the reach of change. It is near perfection.

For Howard's Conan, change occurs frequently throughout his career as he is variously promoted, aged, and emboldened. Notice, in fact, that the current television story is much closer to the Campbell tradition than the Howard version. In the TV series, the hero never changes, never wavers, and is embarked on a quest to save Cimmeria from evil. His sword play, instincts, and fighting skills are more or less perfect; he rarely loses a fight. Purists scoff at the burdens placed on the Rolf Mueller version of Howard's best barbarian; for the closer Conan treads toward the hero-adventurer, the further he strays from Howard's ideal.

Certainly, there are times when Conan reaches perfection in his battles. His sword strokes rain down in steady, remorseless patterns and his tricks, traps and craftiness serve him well. But has he truly reached apotheosis? Or is Howard just getting him out of one more jam by relying on his powerful strength?

## 11. The Ultimate Boon

For a true adventurer-hero, there comes a time when the adventure eases up and the tenor of the quest changes.

Says Campbell: "Where the usual hero would face a test, the elect encounters no delaying obstacle and makes no mistake." (p. 172) For some heroes, the gods bestow a gift of immortality, eternal life, etc. But the boon could also be disguise, X-ray vision, or super-strength. For at this point, the hero has all that is needed for the completion of the labor. This marks the end of Phase 2, *Initiation*, and the beginning of Phase 3: *Return*.

## Initiation

12. Refusal of the Return
13. The Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16. Master of the Two Worlds
17. Freedom to Live

At this point, the classic *Hero With A Thousand Faces* becomes more mystical than heroic. Luke Skywalker, for example, was by the third movie a full-fledged Jedi master. He had conquered The Force, come to grips with his destiny, gained absolute power, and resolved his hatred/love toward his father. He was a master of both the mystical forces and the normal world, and he was free to live in either. Classic Campbell; it's well known that Lucas conferred with Campbell and read his work avidly. By the end of the saga, Luke has been transformed into a far different character than the one who started the story.

But where does Conan become mystical and a master of two worlds? Basically, never. Howard set him up to abhor wizards and sorcery, and to trust only his wits and his sword. The first Conan story, *The Phoenix on the Sword*, was of course a snapshot from late in Conan's career. He was content then to sit down and correct library maps, as depicted in the first scene. There is nothing mystical, magical, or masterful here; it is simply a duty of a king leading a disgustingly peaceful life.

In essence, we need to come to grips with what Howard had in mind for Conan. Was it simply a Hyborian Age version of Horatio Alger? Was Conan ever meant to be like Hercules and Odysseus, to fit into the great pantheon of heroes? Or was Howard hell-bent on commercial success, on constructing a new, unique type of hero that would make more money?

In the end, it doesn't really matter what Howard meant to do; the character seemed to come to life and breath his own breaths. Howard's storytelling subconscious guided the bronzed barbarian through a series of tests and confusions that sometimes recycled prior Howard themes, and sometimes plowed new ground. But they rarely bored us, and, combined with what we know about Howard's outlook on life, they tell us a lot.

What Howard never did was propel his heroes through anyone else's expectations. He ran out of enthusiasm for them, or the spirit passed and he ran out of gas. But he didn't kill off his characters; instead, they withered on the vine. The episodes of their serialized lives never amounted to installments in a great heroic endeavor, thus did none of the individual yarns fully parallel the ancient model.

Rather than try to use Howard's heroes to disprove the Joseph Campbell theories, which work so well for so many different myths and stories, instead, Conan is the exception to the rule. Had he become more mystical, gained power through experience with the wizards he slew, or gained insight into the basic conditions of man, Conan might have changed yet again, and wound up mightier still. But he didn't, and we'll just have to deal with the results.

\*\*\*

## Mailing Comments

Carl Osman: Welcome, library man. My wife is a reference librarian at Nike, here in Beaverton. I've been amazed at how many times she's made major changes to her skill set...

Liked your comments on OWWA. I hope you got a little something out of my first crack at an index. That book is a wealth of information...

I thought you showed some great initiative in tracking down the Louys collection. Keep it up!

Okeefe: On Howard content -- you have none. There is nothing discussing Howard in your 'zine. It doesn't belong in the association. Try again.

Romeo: Amazing work. The parallels between *Black River* and *Bambi* are interesting. I'm not kiddin.

J.D.: Your work is growing exponentially. I'm very impressed with the layout skills and the composition of the pages. I like your writing style, as well, because you mix well between the academic, source-quoting lecturer and the fast-paced bard. Nice work!

Van Hise: What a great collection of Howard content to start out. *Fantasy Crossroads* is way before my time, but I get the distinct impression that there was some fine work in that collection. Your pulp information is excellent. Some day, some how, I'd love to own a few dozen pulps with Howard stories inside. But I can't even get off the west coast to hit PulpCon.

Arney: Nice collection of poetry you pulled together. I guess nobody will confuse your italic font with anyone else's 'zine!

Rickert: 'Course, I'm partial, but I like your two-column format. Your 'zine is coming along nicely. The References part and the cyberspace entry made me think again of a .PDF file that I could click on...although I'd add Staale's Conan site.

Gramlich: Ha! Read it anyway... kinda liked it.

Reasoner: Cool book you penned; I better look for it, eh? Have you seen "*Saving Private Ryan*"? I bet you did...what an amazing movie. The sounds of combat were done so well...Best work I ever saw on the war.

Holmes: What a great collection of biographies. I must admit, I can't always keep some of those guys straight. Your work really helps. Nice job.

Cavalier: Wish I could have bought you a beer at PulpCon. Some day...

McCollum: I still haven't gotten over your epic work in #150. Hand-pencilled, you must have some kind of bionic quill-slinger. Quite simply -- you are da man. I have a convention scheduled next May in Sin-Sin-Ate-Er. We must hook up.

You always seem to nail me to a post with your insight; for example, I shouldn't fuss about Novalyne's scholarship, and I should get off of Charles' back about his 'zine. And no, I won't be so single-minded that I end up exploring Conan's rumored foot fungus from Zembabwei or his absolute refusal to wipe his ass. <sigh> I guess it isn't that REHupa is a rough crowd -- they're so damn smart. Ya can't get away with nothing...

*[I don't really have any art for this issue; maybe next time. I put a few color shots in The Hyborian Review, but nothing for REHupa this time. I'll have to conjure up a better topic that lends itself more fully.]*

END