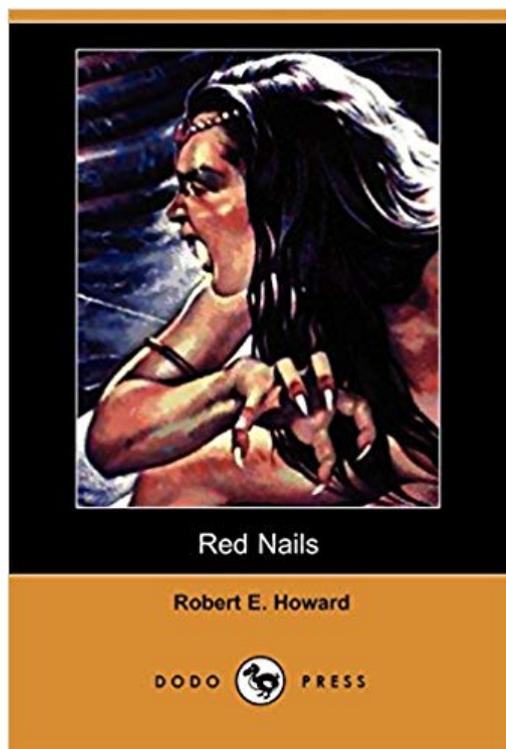


Red Nails (Dodo Press) by Robert E. Howard



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Robert Ervin Howard (1906-1936) was an American pulp writer of fantasy, horror, historical adventure, boxing, western, and detective fiction. He is well known for having created the character Conan the Cimmerian, a literary icon whose pop-culture imprint can be compared to such icons as Tarzan of the Apes, Sherlock Holmes, and James Bond. Voracious reading, along with a natural talent for prose writing and the encouragement of teachers, conspired to create in Howard an interest in becoming a professional writer. One by one he discovered the authors that would influence his later work: Jack London and Rudyard Kipling. It's clear from Howard's earliest writings and the recollections of his friends that he suffered from severe depression from an early age. Friends recall him defending the act of suicide as a valid alternative as early as eighteen years old, while many of his stories and poems have a suicidal gloom and intensity that seem prescient in hindsight, describing such an end not as a tragedy but as a release from hell on earth.



Reviews of the [Red Nails \(Dodo Press\)](#) by Robert E. Howard

Doukree

The subject line I put on this is a bit flip. The truth is that I hadn't read any Conan before, only being previously familiar with the movies, and so I don't know what's not to like about the original written version. :-) This story is, I think, an excellent entree into Conan writings, without having to commit a huge amount of time to it.

The story is very interesting and unusual in a lot of ways. (How it compares to other Conan stories, I don't know yet.) For one thing, throughout a lot of the story, including a lot of the beginning, Conan is not quite the main character ... the girl is, which I very appropriate to today's times (when even action stories often have female main characters), even though the story was written close to a century ago. Then too, even though Conan himself is a "barbarian", self-admittedly, he seems quite articulate and intelligent, unlike the taciturn, barely-speaking Conan of the movies. The adventure that Conan and the girl are thrown into is interesting, too, as well as being very imaginative and extremely odd.

Highly recommended.

Watalate

No fan of Conan would give such a lousy review and only 2 stars! This is one of Robert E. Howard's (1906-1936) best stories ever as told by all REH Scholars! REH is the creator of Conan, Bran Mak Morn, Red Sonja, Kull, Solomon Kane, and many other characters and even poetry and horror stories! He's the best writer and poet ever!

Red Nails starts out with a prehistoric monster chasing Valeria with Conan in hot pursuit. They climb a tree and from their the story gets really good.

If you've never read a REH story you're in for a real treat! Read Red Nails for free and then get the REH Ominbus 99 stories for only \$1.99 and read other outstanding stories he's written.

Beyond The Black River, Red Nails, and Tower of The Elephant are three of my favorite REH Conan stories.

Other suggested REH stories: Blood and Thunder, The Life and Art of REH by Mark Finn, One Who Walked Alone by Novalyne Price Ellis his girlfriend, The Dark Barbarian by Don Herron, The Collected Letters Vol 1-3 of REH, The Collected Poetry of REH, and Two-Gun Bob.

Heri

Just for the record, "Red Nails" has nothing whatsoever to do with the manicurist profession, nor with the sort of people who get manicures. The only manicures characters get in this story are at the throat, and they are mostly fatal. "Red Nails" is one of Robert E. Howard's well-known series of pulp fantasy stories about Conan the Barbarian. The plot is probably one of the most bizarre of all that series, combining elements the story of the Hatfields and McCoys Feud with elements of "The Lost World" and "She". Like all the Conan series the story is extremely violent, and much of it is actually rather sadistic. In fact, if anything, the violence in "red Nails" is cranked up several notches from what is portrayed in the well-known movie versions. Furthermore, since this story was probably written during the 1930s, don't expect any present-day "politically correct" attitudes from any of the characters. That sort of thing hadn't been invented yet during Howard's own era, let alone in the remote, mythical age in which his stories were set.

In addition, don't expect to find much social conscience or character-development here either. Emotions and motivations tend to be pretty basic among the characters in Robert E. Howard's stories; things such as physical hunger and thirst, lust, greed, rage and, of course, the basic desire to survive. In that respect, Howard was definitely not Sinclair Lewis or John Steinbeck, but that was OK, because he really wasn't writing for their readership, anyway.

All that being said, readers who enjoy a fast-moving and extremely violent excursion among a set of outrageously barbarous characters, set in a remote and bizarre venue, need look no further. If pure escapism is what you're after, "Red Nails" is the perfect way to while away a dull afternoon.

Grinin

I read the comic adaptation of Red Nails long before I read this book, and I must say the book is a great deal more enjoyable than the comic. However, with Robert E. Howard, "enjoyable" is a relative term. I honestly don't think he intended for his stories to be enjoyed. They are far too dark, depressing, and hopeless for terms like "enjoyable" to apply. What Howard does in Red Nails, just as he did in The Shadow of the Vulture, is paint a picture of the absolute worst in human nature. The city of Xuchotl is basically a look at human nature under a magnifying glass, devolved to its lowest possible state, until mere existence itself becomes a hellish nightmare that can only be endured by saying goodbye to one's sanity. On the surface, Howard's stories seem to be simple action/adventure fare, but a closer look reveals the stuff that we find in our worst nightmares, the visions and feelings that we have in our darkest moments. I can settle the debates about Howard's mental state right now: he was a disturbed individual. He had to have been touched to write such cynical, dark and hopeless stories. Even his main character, Conan, doesn't fill the role of the "good" triumphing over evil, for in Howard's world there is no real good. Rather Conan is a representation of the raw, primal urge to survive, no matter what the odds. It's not that Conan is any more virtuous than the creatures and men he fights--it's that he simply knows what it takes to remain standing in the end. And that seems to be one of the questions Howard asks in his stories: is it better to be one of the slain, or one of the few left alive at the story's end? Is it really worth it for the ones still standing, given how random, cruel, and merciless the universe is? What exactly do we fight for, if to be locked in combat is mankind's most basic state? This is not a tale that I'll be revisiting, although it was an entertaining read.

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