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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.

Shadows In Zamboula Details

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From Reader Review Shadows In Zamboula for online ebook

Cindy Winder delong says

I'm really enjoying these Conan books. Some people think Conan was harsh at the end of this book. I think justice was served. What do you think?

Perry Whitford says

In the racially mixed westernmost possession of the mighty Turanian empire, 'the people went their way, flaunting their myriad colors in the streets, bargaining, disputing, gambling, swilling, loving, as the people of Zamboula have done for all the centuries its towers and minarets have lifted over the sands of the Kharamun.'

Even in this exotic setting a bona fide barbarian from Cimmeria such as Conan still stands out crowd. When he hears of travelers mysteriously disappearing from the inn of Aram Baksh, Conan decides to stay for the night to see if the stories are true, discovering an illicit trade in human flesh and a cult of cannibals.

The flesh-eating black slaves of Darfar are only the first obstacle encountered by Conan in this fairly eventful chronicle, which also features other staples of the series, such as a feared and powerful high priest, a beautiful and resourceful damsel in distress, magic, muscle-bound mayhem and, by the end, a surprising amount of subterfuge which leads to a satisfying denouement.

Yes, the inherently racist element in these tales is probably at its most pronounced her, where Conan's usual outlook that white is good and black is bad is difficult to ignore, but then again this is set in a time before recorded history you know, there is enough racism through ignorance still about today, so Conan's innate dislike of difference is not so unlikely.

This story is also notable for the figure of Baal-pteor, the strangler of Yota-pong, a genuine physical threat to Conan and clearly not a very nice man: "'When I was a child they gave me infants to throttle; when I was a boy I strangled young girls; as a youth, women, old men, and young boys"'.

Their confrontation is certainly a memorable one, as are other moments, but overall the story felt a little sketchy, perhaps trying to pack too many strands into the shortest possible format that Howard wrote them in, just four short chapters.

Chad says

Standard fare, but the ending shows a darker side of Conan.

Adi says

It was an interesting story despite being short and a bit too rushed.

Chris says

Good stuff!

So, although I'm mid-thirties, this was the first Conan story I've ever read. Not my fault, really, as I just didn't grow up with this stuff, and was never really interested in fantasy, as a genre. That being said, somehow I became interested in REH a while back, and now, I can't believe I missed this stuff for so long. It's great! If you're looking for adventure, solid storyline, and vengeance, which makes all things right- look no further- this is it! Highly recommended!

S.J.B. Gilmour says

Howard's swashbuckling hero was more the Conan I prefer - that of the wandering mercenary and thief, than that of a leader of an army or pirate. As always, the writing is superb, with a rhythm and vocabulary that grips you from the very first sentence. Like so much of Howard's work, 'Shadows in Zamboula' story practically leaps off the page and, if you read in bed like I do, banishes sleep until the very last word.

Chompa says

A fun listen from Librovox. Conan is in fine form here. Brash, violent, vengeful, and devious.

Of note about Howard's writing. At the time, his description of the voluptuous dancer would have been very provocative and remains very vivid and salacious. The descriptions of blacks in the story is again cringeworthy.

Morgan Alreth says

Conan at his best.

Peter Clay says

Was tired reading Lincoln and found this on Project Gutenberg. Nice quick read! While some of the language is hard to follow as well as some of the content, there is actually is a bit of a story here. It kept me through and it was the perfect length. Now I can move on with life!

Stephen Brooke says

I once had all the Robert E. Howard Conan stories (though some with overly intrusive edits — avoid those if

you can) but lost my collection years back. This particular tale, 'Shadows in Zamboula' (aka 'Man-Eaters of Zamboula'), is available as a free download at Project Gutenberg.

'Shadows' is a fairly long short story at a little over 12,000 words, a length some would describe as a novelette. It really does have the scope of a fast-paced novel. As Howard's Conan stories go, it is not one of the very best but still a quite entertaining read. The writing sometimes seems a tad hurried and unpolished. That's not to be unexpected with work churned out for the pulp market.

The tale all takes place in the course of a single night in the city of Zamboula and includes Howard's usual mix of sorcery, deception and violence. Cannibals, evil priest-wizards, beautiful but untrustworthy women, and, of course, fighting men all interact with the barbarian — who has more brains and ability than any give him credit for. As a character, there is perhaps less depth to Conan here than in some of the other stories. He's not all that terribly interesting. For that, 'Shadows in Zamboula' doesn't quite make it to five stars.

John says

This was a great Conan story. Plenty of muscle and lots of guile. Plus a nice twist at the end.

Jakk Makk says

[keep cannibals contained as needed. If memory serves, a similar device is used in The Shadow Over Innsmouth. This causes me to check lock security when I sleep in strange places. It's benefitted me several times, like when adjacent hotel (pass-through) doors were left unlocked. Chapter one could be skipped or boiled down to, "Don't go in there, Irish." The racism dist

Ray Smith says

Good action and chuckles. This is even more racist and sexist than other Conan short stories, but since this was written in the 1930s, I guess that's par for the course.

Niraj says

Nice short read with great action. Don't like the prejudice of that era, but a great book nonetheless.

Seth Kenlon says

A fantastic Conan story filled with surprises and ulterior motives. Keeps you guessing all the way through, with appealing characters with hints of backstories that'll keep your brain wandering for the rest of the evening after reading it.

Also, pretty gory and horrific.

It's pretty short, too, so it's a good one for the train or a lazy afternoon (whatever those are).
