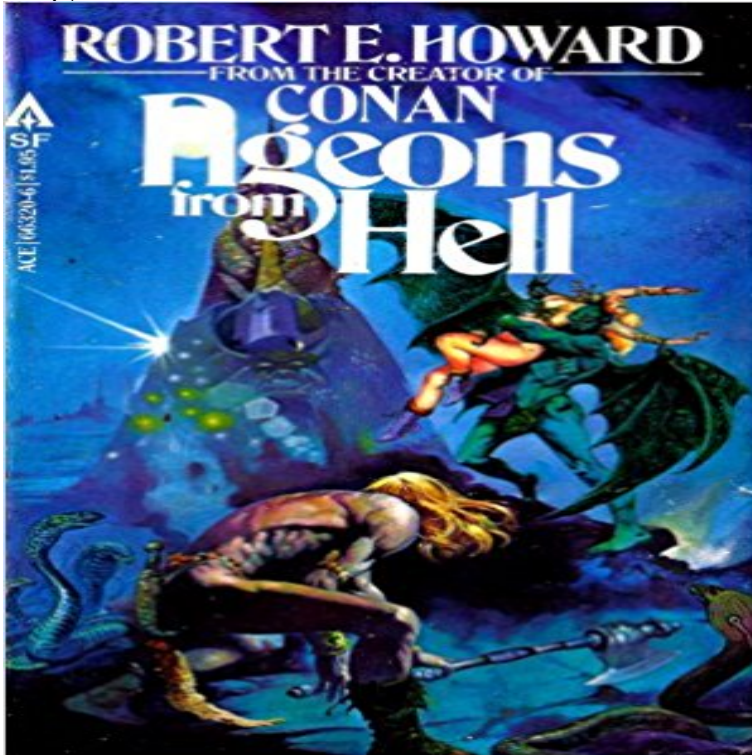


Pigeons From Hell



Pigeons from Hell is a short story by Robert Ervin Howard. Robert Ervin Howard (January 22, 1906–June 11, 1936) was an American author who wrote pulp fiction in a diverse range of genres. He is well known for his character Conan the Barbarian and is regarded as the father of the sword and sorcery subgenre. Howard was born and raised in the state of Texas. He spent most of his life in the town of Cross Plains with some time spent in nearby Brownwood. A bookish and intellectual child, he was also a fan of boxing and spent some time in his late teens bodybuilding, eventually taking up amateur boxing. From the age of nine he dreamed of becoming a writer of adventure fiction but did not have real success until he was 23. Thereafter, until his death at the age of 30 by suicide, Howard's writings were published in a wide selection of magazines, journals, and newspapers, and he had become successful in several genres. Although a Conan novel was nearly published into a book in 1934, his stories never appeared in book form during his lifetime. The main outlet for his stories was in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. Howard's suicide and the circumstances surrounding it have led to varied speculation about his mental health. His mother had been ill with tuberculosis his entire life, and upon learning that she had entered a coma from which she was not expected to wake, he walked out to his car and shot himself in the head. In the pages of the Depression-era pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, Howard created Conan the Barbarian, a character whose cultural impact has been compared to such icons as Tarzan, Count Dracula, Sherlock Holmes, Batman, and James Bond. With Conan and his other heroes, Howard created the genre now known as sword and sorcery, spawning many imitators and giving him a large influence in the fantasy field. Howard remains a highly read author, with his best

works still reprinted. Howard spent his late teens working odd jobs around Cross Plains; all of which he hated. In 1924, Howard returned to Brownwood to take a stenography course at Howard Payne College, this time boarding with his friend Lindsey Tyson instead of his mother. Howard would have preferred a literary course but was not allowed to take one for some reason. Biographer Mark Finn suggests that his father refused to pay for such a non-vocational education. In the week of Thanksgiving that year, and after years of rejection slips and near acceptances, he finally sold a short caveman tale titled Spear and Fang, which netted him the sum of \$16 and introduced him to the readers of a struggling pulp called *Weird Tales*. Now that his career in fiction had begun, Howard dropped out of Howard Payne College at the end of the semester and returned to Cross Plains. Shortly afterwards, he received notice that another story, *The Hyena*, had been accepted by *Weird Tales*. During the same period, Howard made his first attempt to write a novel, a loosely autobiographical book modeled on Jack Londons *Martin Eden* and titled *Post Oaks & Sand Roughs*. The book was otherwise of middling quality and was never published in the authors lifetime but it is of interest to Howard scholars for the personal information it contains. Howards alter ego in this novel is Steve Costigan, a name he would use more than once in the future. The novel was finished in 1928 but not published until long after his death. *Weird Tales* paid on publication, meaning that Howard had no money of his own at this time. To remedy this, he took a job writing oil news for the local newspaper *Cross Plains Review* at \$5 per column. It was not until July 1925 that Howard received payment for his first printed story. Howard lost his job at the newspaper in the same year and spent one month working in a post office before quitting over the low wages. His next job, at the *Cross Plains Natural Gas Company*, did not last long due to his refusal to be subservient to his boss.

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oaken door sagged as it had before. The blackness of the interior was intensified by the beam of Buckners light playing on the sill.