



Heart of Darkness

Joseph Conrad (1857 - 1924)

Read by:	Bob Neufeld	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Genre:	Action & Adventure Fiction		

Aboard a boat anchored on the River Thames, Marlow, the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, tells a story of a journey up the Congo River into the Congo Free State in heart of Africa in search of an ivory trader named Kurtz. Conrad had taken a similar journey, and based the narrator in part on himself. Things are seldom as they should be. The first station he visits is a scene of brutal devastation. The steamboat he is to pilot is wrecked and takes months to repair. The company personnel are lazy and self-serving. After two months his vessel is attacked a few miles from their destination. Fending off the attack, he arrives and is met by a bizarre Russian wanderer and discovers posts adorned with the severed heads of natives. Marlowe soon learns that Kurtz is wor-

shipped by the natives, is very ill, and is likely out of his mind. Marlowe manages to get Kurtz aboard against his will for the return journey, which, of course, is filled with further perils and disasters. Marlowe returns to Europe deeply disillusioned and highly skeptical of humanity's attempts to achieve any kind of real civilization. His perspectives are among the first to expose the pretenses of civilized people and question the motives and behavior of imperialist and colonial powers. Modern Library ranks *Heart of Darkness* at number 67 on its list of the 100 best novels of the twentieth century. It is further distinguished as the most analyzed of all books taught in literature courses in high schools and colleges.

Joseph Conrad (December 3, 1857 – August 3, 1924) occupies a unique place in the pantheon of great English writers: he was a Polish native who did not learn English until his twenties but became a master stylist who brought a non-English sensibility to English literature. He was born an only child into a noble family in an area of Ukraine that had been a part of the Kingdom of Poland and was then ruled by Russia. His family was active in efforts to attain Polish independence; his father was a writer, activist and revolutionary jailed for a time for resistance. Both parents died by the time he was twelve and he went to live with his uncle in Krakow. He was a poor student but well read, partaking of Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, romantic Polish poets, and tales of the sea. He joined the French merchant marine at age 17 and the British merchant marine four years later, serving for fifteen years and achieving the rank of captain. He became a British subject in 1886 but remained a Russian citizen until 1889. He gave up the sea due to poor health at age 36 and pursued his fascination with writing, publishing his first novel in 1895. His stories and novels were set at sea and often dealt with European colonial cultures outside the Anglosphere. He combined elements of nineteenth century realism with modernist anti-heroes and irony, delving deeply into the dark psychology of the human spirit dealing with an inscrutable world. He was well received by the critical community and influenced T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Graham Greene, among others.