



The Hour of the Dragon

Robert E. Howard (1906 - 1936)

Read by:	Mark Nelson	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Hour of the Dragon, also known as *Conan the Conqueror*, is the longest and one of the last of the Robert E. Howard fantasy novels featuring Conan the Cimmerian, also known as Conan the Barbarian. In many ways it is a distillation of the motifs and themes common to the Conan canon. We begin with a middle-aged Conan reigning as King of Aquilonia and prey to a group of conspirators who seek to depose him and restore the throne to Valerius, heir of his predecessor, Numedides. With the aid of the ancient sorcerer Xaltotun they overcome the Aquilonian army and capture Conan. While he awaits execution a sympathetic slave girl, Zenobia, risks her life to set him free. He sets out on an arduous quest to defeat the wizard and regain

his throne, vowing to make Zenobia his queen. The story was serialized in five issues of pulp magazine *Weird Tales* from December 1936 – April 1936 before appearing in book form in 1950. Critic Groff Conklin praised the book as “a sanguinary combination of sorcery, skulduggery, and swordplay.”

Robert Ervin Howard (January 22, 1906 – June 11, 1936) was an American pulp fiction author best known for his character Conan the Barbarian and considered the father of the “sword and sorcery” fantasy fiction subgenre. Born and raised in Texas, his father was a country doctor who had a penchant for get-rich-quick schemes. The resulting financial problems led to marital difficulties and frequent moves. His mother, who suffered from tuberculosis her entire life, felt she had married beneath her station. As a child Howard dreamed of becoming an author of adventure fiction and achieved his first success at age 23. His writings were published in a wide selection of magazines, journals, and newspapers in several genres. The main outlet for his stories was the Depression-era pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, which featured Conan the Barbarian, a character whose cultural impact has been compared to that of such icons as Batman, Count Dracula, James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, and Tarzan. Howard remains a popular author, with his best works still continuously in print. His suicide at the age of 30 led to speculation about his mental health: when he learned that his mother had entered a permanent coma, he walked out to his car and shot himself in the head.