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## Heart of Darkness

**Joseph Conrad**
Scenario Productions (May 2000)
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In the early part of the twentieth century, families gathered around radios to be entertained by a new play. Repertory companies made up the cast of voices for these plays. Voices came through the radio, taking their audience on adventures by ingenious use of words, inflection, sound, and even silence.

*The Heart of Darkness* and *The Investigator* are two plays now available as audiobooks. These vintage plays entertain while parodying history, inviting the history buff, the lover of words, and those seeking to examine man's subconscious on a journey of sound waves.

Conrad's The Heart of Darkness is said to be one of the most thought-provoking and controversial plays of its time. Marlow, Conrad's narrator, recounts a tale of his experience in 1889 while piloting a steamboat up river in Africa. His mission involved locating an agent for a Belgian company engaged in the profitable ivory trade. Marlow's tale delves into many areas: race, colonization, imperialism, and the light and darkness that lurk in man's soul. The play could be summarized in these words spoken by the agent Marlow was to find: "The horror, the horror." Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film, Apocalypse Now retells Conrad's story in another setting but with the same air of darkness.

*Heart of Darkness* should be listened to closely in order to find the story within the story. Also it may take a few minutes to acclimate oneself to the sounds of the Congo competing with the sometimes-excited clipped voices.

After The Heart of Darkness, one will be ready for a little intellectual relief, although Ship's The Investigator still requires some knowledge of history to allow full enjoyment of this parody of the McCarthy era.

Killed in a plane crash, the investigator finds himself in a strange place, standing with the gatekeeper in heaven. He will have to be investigated in order to past through the pearly gates.

The play takes on all the characteristics of the McCarthy era. The Red scare in heaven involves reopening files of souls already in heaven that are suspected as subversives. Socrates, Thomas Jefferson, Karl Marx, Martin Luther, and Abraham Lincoln are all suspect. The play invokes the same paranoia and political backstabbing as history records. In the end the play echoes words spoken by the investigator at the beginning of the play but with much comedy, "I am the chief, I am the chief."

VYVYAN LYNN (July / August 2000)

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