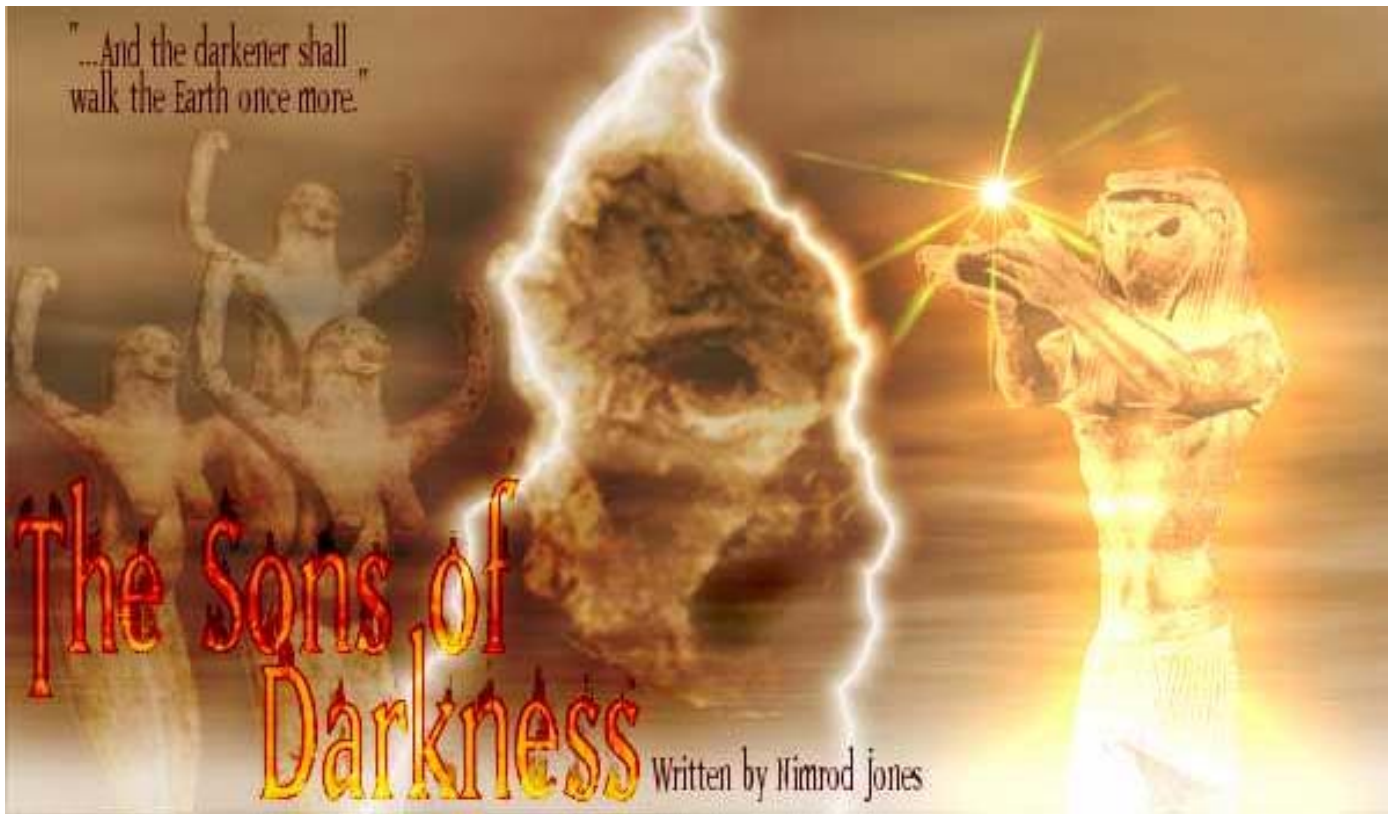


# THE ZEN CADET PRESENTS



## SORCERER: CULT OF ISIS Episode Two: The Black Skull

A MINI-CHRONICLE AND SETTING FOR  
SORCERER: REVISED EDITION

A Supplement for Mage: The Ascension

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### WEB EDITION

In the interests of copyright certain elements that were made available for convention editions have been removed for this version. It is assumed that you have the relevant books to run and play this adventure.

# The Sons of Darkness: Episode Two

# The Black Skull

*Sorcerer: The Cult of Isis* is a setting for *Sorcerer: Revised Edition*, a source book on hedge-magicians for *Mage: The Ascension*. The Reborn are portrayed in *Mummy: The Resurrection* and *Mummy: Second Edition*, but as this story is set in 1937 the Shemsu-heru, and not the Amenti, are the focus of the Cult's attention here.

*The Black Skull* is the second part of *The Sons of Darkness* mini-chronicle at [www.zencadet.com](http://www.zencadet.com) but it can be played as a standalone if desired.

## SETTING

*The Sons of Darkness* is based in the 1930s during a time of much archaeology and international intrigue. A time before computers and much modern technology, and a setting for the classic cinematic adventures. It is during the time of the last decades of Horus' "life" and the rise of Hitler to power in Germany.

## MOOD

The mood is that of an *Indiana Jones*<sup>TM</sup> film meets *Call of Cthulhu*<sup>TM</sup>. The atmosphere is one of high adventure and dark revelations; of secret wars where mere mortals fight (and defend) forces greater than themselves.

## THEME

The theme of *The Sons of Darkness* is one of struggle and heroism, of ancient secrets and a "modern" world losing control, being eaten from within by corruption. They are the Keepers of Ancient Secrets and the eyes and ears of the immortal Shemsu-heru, the Reborn Followers of Horus.

It should be noted that this scenario was originally written two years ago, before *White Wolf* announced that they were writing *Adventure*. However, for those who have played this game, the atmosphere is similar to that.

## STORYTELLING TIPS

The game is fairly freeform and the scene numbering is only the rough order in which things could happen.

This is a story with a classic twist, but so much so that the Storyteller must be very careful. Randolph can easily suffer from the "obvious villain" syndrome if you play him as having too much to hide. When I ran this for the first time with my group a couple of them began suspecting Randolph almost from the first time they met him. It was an unfounded and irrational suspicion, but one nurtured from all the same TV shows, films and fiction as myself, and most likely your players, too. It's important that Randolph comes across as polite (not *too* polite lest he once again fall into the "obvious villain"), helpful and above all sincere. He should be concerned in all the right places, get upset about the same things. If he can fool not only the Cult of Isis but also a several-thousand-year-old vampire then he can certainly pull the wool over the player characters.

## CONTINUITY AND EXPERIENCE

If you are running this game as the second part in the complete or partial series then continuity is important. If anything contained in this scenario conflicts with the continuity of your own games then dismiss it.

For the Convention Editions of this scenario the characters were exactly the same as in the first episode with no experience or additions to their character sheets. For the complete series you will wish to award experience. It is completely down to your own style of play how much you award and whether you allow them to spend it prior to this adventure.

Although this scenario is supposed to come immediately after *The Eye of Ra*, feel free to add appropriate adventures between them if you so wish.

## CHARACTERS

The game is designed for four to six players with a seventh character for any overflow. The seventh character, Mandek, is important for the larger chronicle for which *The Black Skull* is the second part; however, his importance is less for a one-off game if this is how you are playing this. You may play him as an NPC if you wish.

However, there are certain characters whose importance in the game should not be dismissed. For the convenience of the Storyteller who has less than six players here are some brief notes on the characters in order of importance.

Charles Forthroy III — Charles is sort of the central character in this, but this is not to say that any of the other characters are any less important. It involves all of the characters, but it is Charles' home-turf and his friends.

Lou MacBride — A New York cop, psychic and natural prophet. One again Lou is one of the most important characters since his visions hold can possibly hold the key in the unlikely event that the players are completely clueless. His visions are not so vital as in *The Eye of Ra*, but still serve the same purpose.

Pablo Menendez — In London it is quite possible that Pablo will feel more comfortable and at home here than his father.

Sherrilyn Sweet — Hopefully, this apparently quiet and reserved librarian has proven, by now, that there is more to her than meets the eye.

Adranio Menendez — Where his son goes, he does travel also. Unless there's not enough room on the plane and he decides to go back to Cairo.

Elita Fortier — Still at the bottom of the list Elita is still a potentially useful character to have around. Her moment to take the spotlight, as it were, comes in the next thrilling episode.

Mandek — Still the bonus character. However, Mandek might still prove to be useful to have around. You can play him as an NPC or you may leave him behind in Geneva with the others on their way back to Cairo.

## HISTORICAL ACCURACY

To hell with historical accuracy! (—says the guy that spent three days trying to get the newspaper handout look “authentic” and researching European history for 1937.) This is a game but creat-

ing the right atmosphere is important. If you're not sure about something in 1937, don't worry about it. You don't know exactly how London operated? Don't worry about it, go with what just feels right for the game.

Anyone who knows enough about 20<sup>th</sup> Century history will know that the newspaper articles could never have come out in this way. Firstly, I couldn't find (without spending days or weeks in a library) a genuine 1930s newspaper front-page from the UK so the heading (and the adverts, and the modified “Hotel Mystery” article) come from 1918. With two Spanish characters, I had to put in some information about the Spanish Civil War. At the time, the rise of fascism in Europe was of great concern, but the Spanish Civil War was the largest war happening at the time, although Hitler and Mussolini had already formed an alliance by now. Guernica was bombed in April of '37 and despite Franco's denials, it was actually on his suggestions that Germany attacked. The conflict at Brunete did not happen until early July and I see the story set during the summer, but you may change it to whenever you feel. I've tried to keep the precise date deliberately anonymous to make it generic 1937. However, I wanted to give the players a feel that there is a whole world of history in the making going on around them.

The actions ascribed to Fianna Fail did actually happen, but not necessarily as something that *happened* as something that was *happening*. I could find no specific dates on their activities, but I really wanted to mention them if for no other reason than the nice *World of Darkness* name connection.

The “Freak Accident” is completely fabricated and has nothing to do with this story, and the “Congo Expedition” is actually setting up a character for Episode 3. If anyone should ask about the two characters mentioned in the newspaper (Prof. Knappert and Prof. Ubel), Elita knows of their work. Knappert she has met a couple of times, but his work is mostly Assyro-Babylonia and Sumeria. He's out in Persia at the moment, excavating. Ubel is mostly an anthropologist, but started out in archaeology and still moves in those circles from time to time. During the Great War he escaped Germany and spent much of his time in Africa, which is when his field changed to anthropology.

# The Sons of Darkness: Episode Two

## The Black Skull

### THE DAMNED TRUTH

*Warning – This section is strictly for the Storyteller only. This not only reveals the whole story behind The Black Skull but also explains much of the goals of the chronicle's villain, Sebak. Letting players see or read this would pretty much make this scenario redundant!*

Not knowing that her assistant, Rupert Walters, is dead, Dr Ardella Burne flies to London for the study of her exhibit items. The items from the *Virgo Thespis* have arrived and naturally she is distraught with the news about the disappearance of both Rupert and *the Eye of Ra*, but she has more exhibits to display.

The ancient vampire Sebak has awoken and begun to carry out his diabolical plans. His agents, the Sons of the Serpent, are active in London and they have managed to corrupt a Cultist to act as a spy and an agent.

Randolf Gray is a good friend of Charles Forthroy III, but he has a weakness – he is addicted to opium. This addiction was one thing that brought about his eventual demise. At first the Sons of the Serpent exploited this by supplying him his opium after cutting off all his other sources. Then they started asking tasks of him. At first the tasks were small, but they began pressuring him for more and more information and limits. Eventually, Randolf Gray saw the light – especially with the help of a kindly vampire to alter his perception on the world. Randolf Gray is not only under the spell of opium, but of a Follower of Set. Now working for Sebak, Randolf is now a fully-fledged Son of the Serpent, with Cult of Isis powers and resources to boot. He has become very dangerous.

Sebak has been lacking but two more pieces to the body of the bane-mummy Saatet-ta, whom he

plans to resurrect, the skull and the heart. Ardella Burne has found the skull, recently, during her excavations. Randolf has been charged with retrieving the skull, but he has plans of his own, and decides to go a step further and to kidnap Ardella, herself. He has plans, and he thinks that she might come in useful.

Randolf has fallen far further than even Sebak could have foreseen. Having been “enlightened” he has since sought out gaining more power from his magical gifts. He has made an infernal pact with a demon. Randolf Gray seeks to learn the secrets of the Shemsu-heru and to become one by “cheating”. He plans to use Ardella as a human sacrifice in order to attempt to gain knowledge of the Great Rite, The Spell of Rebirth, that is Horus’ secret. He has already become quite powerful as a Sorcerer, but wants more, wants it all.

He has a handful of Sons of the Serpent under his command, but even they are not fully aware of his plans. As Randolf is the only one who knows what is expected of him, they don’t know any better to doubt him. He had two of them steal the skull while another two kidnapped Ardella.

His demonic pact was sealed on a New Moon and he must only summon the demon with which he has made the pact once every New Moon to pay tribute to it. This New Moon he intends to learn more than mere parlour tricks. He believes that the skull will also act as a catalyst for the complete Rite. If the demon can perceive the Rite that surrounds the skull then it knows what to look for, but it will need to find the complete version. There are two days before the New Moon.

Malcolm Pickering is a Cult of Isis member and former associate of both Randolf Gray and

Charles Forthroy III. Together they formed an early association and would learn and practice magic together. Randolph and Malcolm both moved to London while Charles stayed in Gloucestershire. They still meet up often, but Charles hasn't grown to know Randolph in the same way that Malcolm has.

Randolph has managed fairly well to keep his addiction a secret, but Malcolm soon began to suspect something. Unfortunately, by then his addiction had become a seduction to the dark path of Infernalism and the Followers of Set. While Charles was in Egypt, Malcolm came around to visit one evening to find him in the middle of a discussion with a Son of the Serpent (a Settite Ghoul). He overheard them discussing the kidnapping of Dr. Ardella Burne and something about the "skull of the Darkener", which he could only fear referred to Saatet-ta. However, Malcolm was caught spying, and despite managing to elude capture, he was cursed into hiding by Randolph, who has been daily bombarding him with magic to such an extent that it has been all Malcolm could do to protect himself.

As the time grows closer, he has had to make a sacrifice. He dropped his guard enough for some of the magic to get through, but it gave him time to get a telepathic communication to Charles, calling him urgently to London. This was all he was able to transmit before he had to return to protecting himself.

Throughout the story, Malcolm will risk letting down his magical defences in order to send a communication to Charles, leading him to his haven. Once in the same room, he can talk freely without needing to drop any wards.

In the meantime, knowing that Malcolm could uncover his charade, Randolph has been doing his damndest to keep him out of the picture. Malcolm's magic has been the only thing keeping him alive. Without it, he would most likely be dead by now. However, if the players get to him he will be able to tell much about what is going on and how to stop Randolph.

## PROLOGUE

*London, 1937. The night sky thunders and flashes with a passing thunderstorm overhead. The British Museum, empty of all but the security patrolling inside and the old relics inside, tonight it is guest to after-hours visitors.*

*The bones of a once mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex looms mightily over the two black clad figures that creep through the dark halls of the ancient memories.*

*Stealthily they creep towards a section that is as yet still closed to the public. A banner hangs above the entrance with the depiction of pharaohs, reading "The Treasures of Ancient Egypt—Opening June 21<sup>st</sup>".*

*In a section concerning the lives of the ancients, in a glass cabinet is an unusual skull. It is blackened, as if charred, the brow is deep and the eye-sockets stare unseeing, but with malevolence. The missing jaw does nothing to take away the feeling of its evil grimace, grinning with hideous intent.*

*The two figures lift the glass cabinet, pick up the skull and venerably place it into a black velvet cloth bag. The two freeze with the sound of footsteps echoing down the hall, heralding the approach of a night watchman.*

*As the middle-aged man rounds the corner he finds himself standing face to masked face with an intruder. The intruder's eyes flash and the watchman stands, fixated. The second intruder approaches the obviously transfixed man and taking his chin in one hand and resting the other on the back of his neck, he snaps it like a twig. As the watchman falls, the two thieves exchange glances and disappear into the shadows to make their escape with the stolen relic.*

*Meanwhile, outside the Starlight Hotel a black Rolls Royce pulls up outside. Dr. Ardella Burne, dressed in an evening gown, walks down the steps and gets into the car.*

*"Evening, James," she says, automatically, upon getting in. There is no reply from the chauffeur as the car pulls away.*

*She sighs. "I find these museum functions so tedious," she continues in a casual chatty tone, "but I guess they're the only way to get money to spend months at a time rummaging around in the sand."*

*There is still no reply from her chauffeur. "James?" she says. There is still no reply.*

*"You've passed it. You were supposed to stop here." Her voice now shows traces of worry. Something's wrong.*

*The she hears the hissing sound, and sees the gas coming from the bottom of the car. "James? James! What's going on?" She tries to wind a window to realise that the handles have been removed. The gas is already beginning to choke her and she tries to open the door to find that, again, the handles have been removed. The driver, who is not James, drives on unaffected. She's beginning to feel light-headed, dizzy. She stumbles forward to see the driver. His face is covered in a gas mask as he glances over at her for a moment. And then she blacks out.*

## I: DESTINATION ⊕ DIVERTED

Geneva, 1937. The players are preparing to return to Egypt after their last adventure. They are at the airport waiting to board the plane.

Give the following handout to Charles:

*You are standing waiting for the plane, when you suddenly hear a voice in your head say: "Help me, Charles." It is a familiar sounding voice, that of a tired, young male, but it is distant, whispery and you cannot quite place it yet. "Come to London. Help!"*

No sooner has Charles heard this voice than a silver Jaguar pulls up and a man that they all recognise as Isaac Raven's butler, Carstens, comes running up to them with urgent news.

It was announced on the wireless that Dr. Ardella Burne has gone missing on the same night as an ancient relic from the British Museum was stolen. It should be implied that they go to London, if any of them doubt whether or not they should go throw in an appearance of Isaac Raven from the Jaguar to instruct them so.

Any characters not in control of a player may decide to return to Egypt anyway, to keep an eye on things.

The next plane to London is due in about an hour. If the players wish to do anything with their time before they leave this is their opportunity.

Otherwise, during the flight, give Lou his first vision:

*Two sheep in a field, a serpent slithers up and bites the one sheep, which turns into a wolf and devours the second sheep. The wolf howls into a moonless sky. There is a fiery pentagram with a skull in the centre. A bloodied dagger, wielded by a grey-clad figure, obscured from sight. The feel of evil and the smell of sulphur in the air; a mighty screech, as from an eagle; and the serpent coils around the majestic bird, a Golden Eagle, and crushes it to death. The two bodies merge and become the hermetic emblem, which fades to red blood that trickles away. The fiery pentagram swallows the grey figure and there is a terrifying roar.*

Also, during the journey, give Charles "Chuckers" Forthroy his *Expanded Background*.

## 2:I: ⊕ OLD FRIENDS, "PICKERS"

Charles should be encouraged to look up his two old friends in London, if he hasn't decided to do this anyway. They are both Cultists, so they should be able to help. If he tries to find Malcolm "Pickers" Pickering first, then he will discover from his butler, Elsworth, that he hasn't been seen for the past week and a half.

Elsworth is both helpful and friendly towards Charles, but may be a little suspicious of his little more uncouth companions. He will still remain, always, polite and courteous, but allow plenty of opportunity for him to demonstrate that he is watching all of the suspicious characters. For example, you may want to really make something of the opulence of the Pickering household. It is very plushly furnished with many expensive ornaments on display. When describing this you may want to describe some of the small pocketable items while looking at the thieves' players.

While looking at a series of ornaments of some description, Elsworth might break from what he is doing to come over and describe a little about the ornament that the character is eyeing up. This is a very deliberate act on Elsworth's part. It might include a statement such as, "There are seven in this room," that indicates to the character that he will notice if they are missing. If they should attempt to pocket something "successfully" he will ask for it back at some point before they leave. No need to roll any dice, even if they think he was completely distracted. He's a *good* butler.

## 2.2: ⊕ OLD FRIENDS, “RANDY”

When they get round to checking on Randolph “Randy” Gray they will find him at home, he is recently without a butler since, he will explain, he “got bored of the old codger always complaining.” This is something that Charles should vividly recall of Randolph’s old butler, Meynard. Randolph is living in a rather stylish London house on a small estate on the outskirts.

Unfortunately, he will explain that he is having some renovation work done during the week so he won’t be able to put anyone up while they’re here, but Charles will certainly be able to stay at his usual hotel. They may even wish to stay at the Starlight Hotel, where Ardella was staying, in the hope of gaining some clues.

If asked about what he knows of Malcolm’s disappearance, he will explain that in the weeks leading up to his disappearance, Pickers had become distant and self-absorbed. He fears that Pickers might have done something “rash”.

If asked about what he knows of the skull he will reply that he knows little, other than it’s a blackened and strangely shaped skull. More than that he claims ignorance.

As far as what he knows of Ardella Burne, he says he knows her name and has read about her disappearance in the newspapers, but the only connection he can see is that it was she who discovered the skull. “Perhaps,” he speculates, “it was she that absconded with the skull. For what reasons, one cannot imagine.”

The newspaper reports will provide them with some clues if they wish it (see handout).

## 3: INVESTIGATIONS

Any investigations the players take will mostly be a repetition of information already gleaned from the report.

- At the Starlight Hotel the players might learn from the doorman that he last saw Dr. Burne getting into the black Rolls Royce that her chauffeur, James, usually drives. However, tonight he is certain that it was not James driving.
- If they should get to speak to Mr. Giles Carterman, the Museum curator, they might learn a little something about the exhibition. Most of the discoveries on display are recent discoveries of Dr. Burne. The other 25% of

the exhibits are comprised of the discoveries of other archaeologists. Dr. Burne has been very prominent in her excavations during the past year.

The newspaper report, unfortunately, holds many red herrings. The journalist responsible has managed to piece together many unrelated and genuinely coincidental events to make a whole. There has been some activity in Brixton with a conflict between werewolves that got out of hand, the meteor shower is another story, and the thunderstorm was a nearby sorcerer practising her Weathercraft.

However, if the players should ever seem to be hitting close to the mark, arrange for something to distract or prevent them. If this happens enough times, they might get suspicious, which they should be.

In addition, you may wish to throw in a communication or two (depending on how long this section lasts) from Malcolm a. k. a. “the strangely familiar, wispy voice”. Be careful not to give too much away too early if you do. If the players invite Randolph along to help them investigate he will company them and will always stay close to Charles unless he has a reason for going off with someone else (like assessing how much of a threat they are).

## 4: THE SONS ATTACK!

This scene can be played whenever you feel it is appropriate, and if you feel that you can use it more than once, go for it, but I don’t recommend it unless you’re getting particularly inspired.

Randolf knows that the characters are investigating, and he wants to keep them busy for the next couple of days. Therefore, he’s arranged for the Sons of the Serpent to cause them a bit of trouble. If they die in the process, it will be a bonus. And by they, Randolph considers both the Sons *and* the players’ characters. Obviously, the Storyteller shouldn’t be out to actually kill a player character, but make it look convincing that they really are trying to kill them. If Randolph has been accompanying them with their investigations then he will have the time to assess who might pose a threat to his plans. They are whom he will target; otherwise, Charles will be the target. If he should see Sherrilyn in action then she will be targeted either individually or additionally.

The attack can come at any time in a moment that you feel is most dramatic and in whatever way is best to move the story along.

It might happen in the streets while they are walking through a shady neighbourhood, perhaps while Randolph is with them. It may seem like a mugging at first, but it should soon become apparent that these are no ordinary muggers. Allow for every possibility of chase and pulp action. Let the players have fun with this bit of action. Feel free to fudge the rolls to make them more of a threat and make the players feel as though they've just about managed to escape. If Randolph is with them don't treat him any differently, he is under attack also, but he might be the first to suggest they retreat if the players are being too stubborn about it. Remember that Randolph will not personally kill his own men, and he certainly won't show off any power that might expose him.

Another possibility is to have the attack happen on the night before the New Moon while they are all asleep in their rooms. The attack could happen at the hotel, allowing for the characters to wake up to the commotion as one of them is attacked. Once again, use as many conventions as possible to squeeze as much action out of this. For instance, looking out of the window might reveal a number of canopies that a lucky adventurer might be able to jump onto, bouncing off each one to get to the street several storeys below while the ruffians make best their escape.

One important thing to happen here is for them to uncover the connection with these guys to Mario and/or the ones that chased them to Geneva. Players may make the link anyway, perhaps thinking that they are still after them because of the Eye. However, if there is any doubt then the serpentine tattoo will be all the evidence they need. This can be revealed in one of two ways. Either by them killing one of the men and then seeing the tattoo on his body, or in the thick of a brawl as one of the characters catches sight of it during a struggle. If no one noticed the tattoo on Mario or the others then this is a good time to introduce the tattoo. The players might know that it relates to the vampire, but the characters will be clueless as to what it means.

If the players have obtained something, some item that they believe is a clue, if Randolph knows about it, then the Sons will also seek to steal that.

Another of Randolph's attempts to keep the characters preoccupied.

## 5: DOUBLE PLAY

Allow a whole day and a half to go by. (The players only have two days from their arrival to London to stop things from going bad; why make things easy for them?) Remember to punctuate this with the attack, above.

In the late afternoon of the second day, Charles receives a message (if asked who delivered it he will find that no one remembers, it was just there). The message is from Malcolm.

Ideally, Randolph should meet them in the morning and Charles should be given the message in front of everyone, including Randolph.

*You are all in grave danger. We must meet, but I cannot tell you where I am just yet. I will send for you later today. There isn't much time. Trust no one.*

Charles might, presumably, trust the other characters. However, if he does not then no matter.

If he trusts Randolph and tells him of the letter (of which Randolph will enquire anyway, and do his damndest to discover its contents) then Randolph will impart to him, and the others, the "truth". He may also volunteer this information as "newly discovered" through his "contacts" if he thinks that they might be getting too close. Either way, this might be a nice ruse to pull.

He didn't want to tell them this before because he "couldn't be sure", but he's been doing some investigating since then and he's discovered some alarming revelations. It would appear that, their once-friend, Pickers has been turned to the side of evil. He works now as a spy for the Children of Set, that he has turned against Horus, against the Shemsu-heru, and against Isis, herself, and given himself over to Apophis. He has murdered Ardella Burne, because she has been uncovering items of worth to the Shemsu-heru and the Cult, while the skull, he suspects, belongs to one of the Shemsu-heru themselves, and he seeks some dark purpose for which he cannot tell.

The arrangement for a meeting, he is sure, is a trap designed to prevent them from interfering in his plans any further.

If the players seem convinced of this, then Randolph will even go so far as to try bringing them into his plan to “stop Pickers’ evil plans”. He will tell them to wait while he goes to make a phone call. If this sways Charles and Lou, have them hear messages and receive a vision respectively.

Charles hears:

*Danger! Come outside!*

Lou receives a variation of an earlier vision:

*Three sheep in a field, a serpent slithers up and bites one of the sheep, which turns into a wolf and devours one of the other two. The third, not noticing, doesn't see the wolf enter the skin of the second and continues to walk by its side.*

If Charles and Lou are too obvious in their sudden distrust of Randolph (presuming Charles follows the instructions and Lou understands his vision) then he will begin to get suspicious and they really will all be in grave danger. However, they have an opportunity to escape while Randolph is on the phone. He has his back turned, and if they are quick enough he might not notice them.

If Charles goes outside he is guided down the street and around a few corners where he finds a car waiting for him. The driver he recognises as Malcolm’s butler, Elsworth (whether he has been to the house or not), and he is told that his presence is required. The others that are there are invited along also.

Any that remain with Randolph are in trouble. They’re left explaining why the others, especially Charles, are not present. Although he appears to accept their excuses (no matter how feeble) he is leading them to their doom. (Storytellers, be creative!)

This, of course, is not to say that they won’t be in danger anyway unless they can excuse themselves in such a way that will not make Randolph suspicious. If they arrange to meet him later he agrees. (His weakness is his overconfidence in his own victory.)

## 6: EXPOSED

Whatever happens to the rest, Charles, at least, should make it to Malcolm’s hide-away. Ironically enough it is in plain sight, a basement room in his home. However, he has so heavily guarded the room against scrying that he has become invisible to Randolph, otherwise even magic wouldn’t help him.

He has not left that room since going into hiding. Elsworth has brought him everything he needs, although he still looks bedraggled and thin. Malcolm, if clean-shaven, might be a young man of around Charles’ age, mousy hair, brown eyes and spectacles. However, his hair is now unkempt, his chin unshaven and his clothes dirty. The small room he occupies is but 12' by 12' by 12'. It has been cleared of all objects bar his books, open or stacked all around him, some miscellaneous tools. An 8' wide circle of chalk has been time and time again marked out in the room – reinforced over and over again.

Only a few candles light the room, so it is difficult to see everything clearly. The only object lying outside of the circle is a wooden box, currently closed.

He will have so many wards about him that he is truly magically protected from any of their magic (he has, after all, been preventing far, far more powerful magic than the other players are capable of). He will invite them into an outer circle of protection (the room itself), but not his inner circle of protection. This, he says, will protect them from their true enemy’s scrying and interference.

He will reveal to them that Randolph is their true enemy. (See Backstory for all the details that he tells them.) He will also give them the talismans he has been constructing.

The talismans are intended to soak up the energy from a magical attack directed at them. But it will only soak so much, so they mustn’t rely on it.

If, they need further convincing, he will make the ultimate sacrifice. He will drop his wards and all of Randolph’s magic will come rushing in to attack him. He will deform and mutate into a grotesque being and will finally collapse dead. If this doesn’t shake the characters up, then all is lost and Ardella is dead, and Randolph’s plan will come into fruition.

Malcolm knows that it is tonight that Randolph will be performing the ritual and he explains that

his former friend is too powerful for a direct assault, but the best time to stop him is actually just as the spell is being cast. It is at this point that his energies will be invested elsewhere and he won't have as much power in reserve to attack them. They must time it just right, else all is lost and Randolph may be impossible for the Cult to stop – perhaps even impossible for the Shemsu-Heru to stop.

He also knows that he will likely have protection while he is preoccupied. If they relate their encounter with the Sons earlier, Malcolm tells them that they are the Sons of the Serpent, servants of the Settites that are also in collusion with Randolph. They will most likely be his protection tonight.

They must rescue Ardella and retrieve the skull. If it truly is the Skull of Saatet-ta then it cannot be destroyed by mundane means and its disposal is best left to a Shemsu-Heru. If they can retrieve it, then Malcolm can ensure that it will be destroyed properly.

## 7: NEW MOON

Randolf's sanctuary is, unremarkably, in his own home (as was Malcolm's). By the time the players have finished with Malcolm, Randolph will have already started preparations for the night's ritual. He is busy establishing wards and casting curses against the characters to prevent their interference. Fortunately, the talismans constructed by Malcolm should be protecting them for now.

Arriving at Randolph's estate there is, in good cinematic style, a thunderstorm starting up. Fork lightning flashes, but the rains haven't hit yet. Unless anyone has done some sort of Divination they won't actually know how many Sons there are in the building.

Whether they know how many there are or not, the rest of the servants are out and there are two Sons outside, two inside.

Watching the house carefully enough reveals one Son at the door, and another walking on patrol. They may take them out however they wish.

Inside the building the other two are busy securing the building. These two may also be dealt with appropriately. All the Sons are armed with rifles. If it breaks down to an all out gunfight, then Randolph will hear this and he will be on his guard by the time they get there. However, he will not break the ritual.

The only entrance to his sanctum is by a hidden door in the library downstairs. It is accessible by opening the globe that is within and pulling the lever inside. The bookshelf will open up revealing stairs leading down to a massive chamber.

Finding this can be a bit of a task in itself and the characters may find themselves wandering all over the house looking for the entrance. If they didn't know how many Sons were in the building then you may wish to keep things interesting by throwing in the occasional additional Son.

If they're taking too long you can have one of the characters accidentally discover it – and not necessarily in the library.

## 8: MANIFEST

The chamber is very expansive, with archways and plenty of pillars and shadows with which to hide.

Ardella has already been attached to the altar and Randolph is just finishing the Summoning. She is unconscious, probably drugged. Randolph feels safe here, and has his back turned while he performs the ritual, unless he has been otherwise alerted to their presence, in which case he is facing the entrance ready to attack them.

They have a very brief time to sneak up (here's where the two Spaniards really get to use their Wonders), rescue Ardella and retrieve the skull before he turns around and notices them.

The room will grow cold and the smell of sulphur will fill the air. Randolph will not be able to leave the circle without first making a banishment. The characters will be safe from him while they wear the talismans, but players shouldn't abuse this, as it will be asking for trouble. If they end up getting into an almighty magical combat with him, then the talismans only hold up for so long before becoming useless.

At first, Randolph tries magically attacking them, but their protection will hold up (initially). Then realising that he has not completed the summoning correctly, he attempts a banishing. However, unable to complete it in time the temple is filled with fires that seem to move of their own accord, almost in the shapes of things that refuses to be seen as he is consumed by a thousand demons from Hell, unleashed upon him by an angry demon.

By now the characters should be heading for the door, if not they are in trouble. The demon is a powerful one and demands retribution.

As the players run for the door, the house bursts into flames around them as the demon's anger is vented. All around them is the screaming and terrifying roar of a thousand demons.

In true dramatic style, they just about get to the door and run down across the lawns when the entire mansion becomes a raging inferno. At this point Ardella could wake just in time to see the flames rise high into the air in a sudden burst and the flaming image of a horned nightmarish creature.

Anyone who fails a Willpower + Occult roll (difficulty 7) is traumatised and suffers the *Flaw: Nightmares* for at least a month afterwards, plus a Derangement for two months (nothing too harsh, but appropriate). Less than three successes will give them nightmares (treat as the *Flaw: Nightmares* for the duration it lasts) for the number of weeks less than three they had (up to a fortnight). If they botch then treat it as a failure, but the Derangement is permanent, and perhaps a little harsher than if it were gained in a simple failure.

Whatever the Derangement it is likely to be triggered every time something that could be considered a terrifying visage is encountered.

You don't need to roll for Ardella as she passes out from the shock.

## 9: KEEPERS

You may skip this scene entirely if you wish, if you are playing the one-off version of this game, and skip straight to the Epilogue.

It is advisable that the characters don't tell Ardella anything if they can avoid it and since she is unconscious it may even be possible to leave her somewhere in the city to be "discovered", or take her back to her hotel room.

However, they may reveal as much as they wish to Ardella, and must decide what to do with the skull. If Malcolm is still alive then his offer to take it to a Semsu-heru that he knows still stands. If the others want to come along he discourages them by saying that the fewer people know the true identity of the Shemsu-heru, the better.

However, if there is some doubt about who should possess the skull, and one of the characters wishes to keep hold of it then Malcolm patiently explains to them that they perhaps have no idea about what the reappearance of the skull represents. Randolph Gray was acting out of a personal lust for power. He was acting against his new master's wishes. If they are trying to retrieve the skull then there can only be one reason, and he prays that they are much further away from the task than he fears.

If he should get round to giving this little warning, at this point would be a good idea to jump to the epilogue, for dramatic impact. The players can decide on any of the fine details at the beginning of the next session.

If Malcolm is dead, then the duty passes to Elsworth who provides them with the same warnings, but adds the question: "Would you wish Master Pickering's sacrifice to be in vain?"

## EPILOGUE

*"You'd better tell him yourself," says Finster to the figure standing in the doorway. The night shades the visitor's features, with a glance over their shoulder they enter.*

*Finster leads the visitor into a vast library, where, up on a ladder, stands the vampire, leafing through a book.*

*"It's been so long since I've read this book," he says without looking up from those dusty pages. "You always remember the contents with such fondness that when you return to read it, you find the writing style crude and vulgar by comparison to your golden memories. Such a disappointment."*

*He returns the book to the shelf and jumps the 14 feet straight off the ladder and lands heavily on the floor of the library, on his feet. He stands himself from his crouched landing position without haste and looks at the visitor.*

*"My dear," he says. "What news bring you?"*

*"I have disappointing news, Sebak," replies the visitor. "Mr. Gray was not as efficient as we thought he might be."*

*"He did not retrieve the skull?" says the vampire Sebak, losing the humour from his eyes.*

*"He retrieved it," replies the visitor. "But he has lost it again."*

*"Next time I consider trusting an opium addict, megalomaniac, remind me of this failure."*

*The visitor approaches Sebak, looking back at Finster momentarily.*

*"There is a danger that the enemy may suspect your plans," says the visitor in hushed tones. "The skull is now in the possession of the Cult of Isis."*

*"Retrieve the skull," growls Sebak. "With the ab almost in my possession I'm not about to lose the head."*

*"Consider it done, my love," says the visitor as she turns to leave.*

## RANDOLF "RANDY" GRAY, CØRRUPT CULTIST

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 4, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Linguistics 4 (Greek, Latin, Hieroglyphs (Demotic), Hebrew, French, German), Melee 3, Performance 3, Occult 4, Subterfuge 4, Stealth 3

Paths: This guy has the all encompassing and most powerful Path of all: *The Path of Anything You Want Him To Do That's Dramatic, Cool and Appropriate* – Don't roll, just do!

Willpower: 5    Resonance: Dynamic (Forceful)

## MALCOLM "PICKERS" PICKERING, CULTIST

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Linguistics 4 (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Hieroglyphs, German), Melee 3, Occult 4

Paths: Not really important

Willpower: 7    Resonance: Static (Meticulous)

## THE SØNS ØF THE SERPENT

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 3, Occult 1, Stealth 3

Disciplines: Fortitude 1, Potence 1, Serpents 1 (Eyes of the Serpent)

Willpower: 6	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

Willpower: 6	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

Willpower: 5	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

Willpower: 4	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

Willpower: 3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

Willpower: 3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Health:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	OK -1 -1 -2 -2 -5 Incapacitated

## PLAYER HANDOUT: CHARLES' EXPANDED BACKGROUND

When you joined the order you quickly made friends with two other Cultists of about the same age and station. These were Randolph "Randy" Gray and Malcolm "Pickers" Pickering. You ("Chuckers", "Chuck" or "Chuckie" as the mood took your friends) and these two were inseparable for most of the time. Together you learnt magic and about the Cult of Isis.

Despite this, you were always the prodigal child. Eventually, Randy and Pickers moved down to London, where they have been establishing themselves. Whenever you get to London you always look them up, although you haven't seen either of them for nearly six months now.

Randolf Gray aka Randy: A riot to be sure. He's a wild one with the ladies and is always good at a party, especially when he's as pissed as a lord. He's the nephew of the cousin of the Duke of Kent, and he's even met the King, which is your one jealous point with him. He's always been a little impatient, but most of the time that's been to his credit as it gets things done.

Malcolm Pickering aka Pickers: Always the quietest of the three, Pickers was the far more studious of you and Randy. Always his head in the books, but with the help of you and Randy, his head would surface enough for him to let loose and have a good time.

## PLAYER HANDOUT: THE VISION

Two sheep in a field, a serpent slithers up and bites the one sheep, which turns into a wolf and devours the second sheep. The wolf howls into a moonless sky. There is a fiery pentagram with a skull in the centre. A bloodied dagger, wielded by a grey-clad figure, obscured from sight. The feel of evil and the smell of sulphur in the air; a mighty screech, as from an eagle; and the serpent coils around the majestic bird, a Golden Eagle, and crushes it to death. The two bodies merge and become the hermetic emblem, which fades to red blood that trickles away. The fiery pentagram swallows the grey figure and there is a terrifying roar.



## PLAYER HANDOUT: THE VISION REVISTED

Three sheep in a field, a serpent slithers up and bites one of the sheep, which turns into a wolf and devours one of the other two. The third, not noticing, doesn't see the wolf enter the skin of the second and continues to walk by its side.

PLAYER HANDOUT: MESSAGE TO CHARLES

