



# The Unravelling

A Starting Point for 1890's Adventures

Genevieve Colter

A DARK TRAPEZOHEDRON PRODUCTION



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*For The Morbidly Curious.*

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Genevieve Colter is a writhing, constantly dreaming, internet-dwelling Mask of Nyarlathotep with her tentacles in many areas, including on Discord! Come say hello to her as Vantablack Pharaoh, along with many other insane cultists, on the Necronomicon Discord at <https://discord.gg/PyQFjG6>.

The Vantablack Pharaoh also has a Blog! Come read my fiction and writings on *Call of Cthulhu* and other topics at <http://www.wherewordsflow.weebly.com!>

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# INTRODUCTION

This mini-scenario is part of a series of short, open-ended mini-scenarios that Dark Trapezohedron Productions refers to as “The Miskatonic Files”. These short scenes and events can be applied to any scenario the Keeper so chooses. They are similar to “Seeds of Doom” in that they are meant to be open-ended and not fully realized campaigns. There is no SAN reward at the end and there is no big reveal, there is only the event for the Investigators to live through and the Keeper to use however they like.

## THE VICTORIAN ERA

The Victorian Era, lasting from roughly 1837 to 1901, was a period of intense industrial growth and prosperity in the United Kingdom. Named for the reign of Queen Victoria, the British Empire flourished under this period, becoming a powerful world player with multiple colonies under its belt, a massive trading powerhouse, and a cornerstone of technological and scientific advancement. Even so, superstitious beliefs and curiosity in the supernatural were at an all-time high, with seances, secret societies, and a general fascination with the strange and unusual being common themes in literature of the period.

In terms of fiction, it has also been the setting for a vast number of horror and speculative fiction stories, including *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Sweeney Todd*, and many other horror classics. It is here we first heard and dreaded the name of Jack the Ripper and felt a chill in our bones at the thought of the mummy’s curse. It is in this period that Edgar Allen Poe, Robert W. Chambers, Bram Stoker, and Mary Shelly wrote what would become horror literature classics, and in this period that Gaston Leroux set his mystery-romance drama, *The Phantom of the Opera*. The importance of tropes and concepts this era of history brought to fiction cannot be overstated and are prime material for a campaign in the universe H. P. Lovecraft created.

This setting has been explored in multiple supplements for *Call of Cthulhu*, particularly in the now outdated *Cthulhu Gaslight*. Although that supplement is not up to date for 7<sup>th</sup> Edition and an updated supplement has not been published by Chaosium yet, it is the author’s opinion that there is still ample potential for adventures in the Victorian era, potential that needs a good introduction to get the Investigators properly acquainted with the feel of the era.



## The Order of the Midnight Circle

In the Victorian era, ladies and gentlemen's clubs were common, somewhat like adult fraternities and sororities. The Freemasons are one such example, and a more modern example would be something like the Moose Lodge. The Order of the Midnight Circle is one of these, and was established in 1834 by a group of former Investigators and occultists in order to share information about matters obscure, supernatural, and dark. Their motto, in Latin, is *Memento vivere, et non morieris* (“Remember to live, for you will die”).

The Order is open to men and women 15 and older, so long as they are willing to confront their own mortality by going through a brief initiation ritual. This ritual involves being locked in a mausoleum overnight with a human skeleton donated by one of the Order’s members, and is more of a hazing than anything else.

The membership of the Order is eclectic, with members from many differing career paths and lifestyles. Many members engage in the investigation of supposedly “haunted” locales for fun, attend seances, and otherwise confront their fear of death by dealing with their own mortality. Meetings are held weekly at a Masonic Temple style establishment so that members can speak with other like minds and enjoy a stiff drink or two. Members are expected to discuss the morbid as a means of accepting their inevitable death, and there is always an interesting tale to hear or mysterious event to investigate if one should take the chance.

## Using This Starter

This scenario is not a full adventure, and is not intended to be. It is a starting hook that aims to get new Investigators together, specifically using the trappings and tropes of classic Romantic and Decadent Literature. As such, most of the characters involved have not been given stat blocks unless they have been specifically created as recurring characters. The starter takes the Investigators into a secret society, the Order of the Midnight Circle, where they meet potential allies and experience something unusual during a mummy unwrapping party. Some suggested scenario connections and allies are included, as well as potential ideas for where this starter could lead the Keeper next. The Keeper should use it as a springboard to spin whatever story they so choose, and place key NPCs from those scenarios into this starter as members of the Order.

This scenario can be linked to other published scenarios as well. When playtesting this starter, one Keeper connected it to “The Black Cat”, extrapolated from *Masks of Nyarlathotep*. Another Keeper might choose to link it to “Edge of Darkness”, “Thoth’s Dagger”, *Horror on the Orient Express*, or another such tale that involves an ancient corpse. If the Keeper has access to scenarios and campaigns such as these, the Egyptian trappings of this starter could easily link Investigators from the 1890’s into a distinctly Victorian-flavored version of those games, and prove to be a very dramatic starting point.

## A Typical Evening

The starter begins with the Investigators at the main lodge of the Order, likely sipping drinks and talking. The players should all decide on different reasons for why their Investigator has joined the Order, ideally something to do with the supernatural or morbid. They will know each other as members, but may or may not know each other personally, as the players desire.

The décor of the Order's lodge focuses on the cheerfully macabre and morbidly sophisticated – a fireplace decorated with taxidermy ravens and skulls has a roaring fire going, the tables are set with cat skulls meant to serve as candle holders, and the trappings on the walls are portraits of former Order members who have passed on. There is a bar serving drinks both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, always staffed with a rotating volunteer bartender. There are servants to help with cleaning things up, private rooms in the back if a member needs to stay the night for any reason, and separate ladies only rooms for the female members to freshen up and relax in.

Tonight, however, is a special night – one that the Order's regular members have been anticipating for months. Tonight, Order Member Dr. Archibald Smythe, an Egyptologist, has brought a mummy from Egypt in order to hold a mummy unwrapping party. Such parties were a common form of entertainment in the Victorian era owing to the large amount of archaeological research occurring in Egypt during that period, causing a trend for Egyptian antiquities and items known as "Egyptomania". Mummies were not considered the priceless preserved artifacts they are today, as they were quite common, and so people thought nothing of damaging these recovered dead. Of course, in the universe of *Call of Cthulhu*, it is very unwise to disturb the dead, especially those from thousands of years ago.

It is exactly this conflict that the Investigators will quite unwittingly be privy to tonight.

## THE UNRAVELLING

Tonight is a special night at the Order, because a highly-anticipated mummy unwrapping party is being held. This has been the talk of the town for those in the know for months now, and everyone's rather excited. Spirits are high, and everyone's so far having a great time before the unwrapping.

During this introduction, apply Interpersonal skill checks as needed. Have the Investigators overhear rumors that connect into later adventures down the road, or perhaps into one specific adventure or campaign if you choose that route. There should be multiple leads to pick up on later, plenty for the Investigators to find out about during the rest of the campaign.

As usual, a few of the Order members are already there. See the Keeper Utilities for more information on these guys, and feel free to flesh them out as desired. Some of the members are connected to other published *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, and as such can serve as lead-ins there. The Keeper can also introduce characters from other scenarios in the future here as members if they want.

At some point, the Order's leaders call the group together for the main event – Dr. Smythe has with some difficulty brought in the sarcophagus and has rested it on the table. The lights are dimmed, and the group gathers to watch as the wooden sarcophagus lid opens. Spot Hidden notices numerous references to specific Egyptian animals, Archaeology to connect them to a specific god (possibly a Mythos deity) of the Keeper's choice. Anthropology on the mummy determines that she is a female, possibly a high-ranking one.

If anyone has Other Language (Hieroglyphs), they can determine that the woman in the sarcophagus was a priestess of the god the Keeper chose, and that dire warnings of curses and death are promised to those who disturb her rest. If the Investigators can't read them, Dr. Smythe can translate, giving the same information. There is a murmur in the crowd as this is revealed; some of the members are superstitious about the possibility of a curse. However, Dr. Smythe will assure everyone that there is no such thing as a curse and it is merely an inscription to scare tomb robbers. History or Archaeology can corroborate this – it was not at all uncommon for the Ancient Egyptians to do this for their dead.

Dr. Smythe asks a member to volunteer for the honor of unwrapping the first layer of the mummy. This should absolutely be one of the Investigators, and the others should be up in the front even if they don't volunteer. Dr. Smythe will choose at random (roll a die if you can't decide). Excitement and morbid curiosity is high as all lean in to observe and the Investigator starts to pull at the crumbling linen bandages, so stiff and fragile in their hands...

### It's Alive!

As the Investigator grabs the bandages and starts to unwrap the mummy, all seems normal. However, they only get about five seconds into it before when the mummy's wizened, ancient, desiccated hand grabs them with an iron grip! (2/1d8 SAN). It is monstrously strong, and requires a matched STR against 80 to pull free. If the roll fails, the mummy attacks for some amount of minor damage (maybe 1d2-1d4), then someone quickly shoots it and it slumps prone in the casket, the hand still clutched onto the victim's wrist in a vice grip. At this point, breaking off the withered hand is an easy task, but not a pleasant one. Once they do, the victim is left in shock with a desiccated hand as a very morbid bracelet until they get the courage to pry it off completely.

If the roll succeeds, the mummy opens its papery eye sockets as the Investigator and the crowd pull away in horror. It slowly sits up with alarmingly stiff motions and murmurs something in Ancient Egyptian. If someone rolls a combined Archaeology/Listen check, they can determine that it mentions something about its patron god and that it is very angry, but not much else. It then slumps prone in the casket. Whomever it whispered to takes 1d2 SAN and feels dreadfully nervous, possibly fit to faint.

Rumors of the mummy being cursed persist and the unwrapping is canceled as the mummy is hastily moved out of the room to a side area. Whomever has the highest POW feels a strange tingling in the air, as if the room is charged with lightning, and it gets stronger as they glance at the mummy. Something is not right...

Later on that night, during discussion and checking to see if everyone's alright, call for a Listen roll – passing means they hear the sound of something heavy hit the floor. If they check, they discover that the mummy has vanished, leaving only an empty sarcophagus and a pile of bandages behind (0/1 SAN). The mummy is nowhere to be found in the building, and rumor swirls that perhaps it got up and walked off.

What has actually happened is that the mummy is indeed that of an Egyptian priestess, revived by her god from a thousand year slumber. She has indeed simply walked away after being revived, and will appear later on in full form as the Keeper so desires. For now however, she cannot be traced. Every so often, however, the papers indicate that a strange shambling figure has been seen in the alleyways at night. When a young prostitute later turns up dead and withered in an alleyway, people assume she had died and been forgotten. The mummy itself is never found.

It is recommended that if the Keeper brings the mummy back as an enemy or threat that they take cues from both the Original Universal Monster movies and the 2000's Remakes of *The Mummy* and *The Mummy Returns*. These can define the creature's abilities and motives, and potentially provide plot hooks for later. Whatever the Keeper decides, for now the Investigators are likely to be rather shaken. Let them query things, pin it on the booze, consider it a great magic trick, or concoct whatever explanation they wish. After all, mummies don't really just get up and walk away... right?

## KEEPER UTILITIES

Here follow a set of characters that could possibly become useful friends and allies in the Order of the Midnight Circle. They can also mostly serve as replacement Investigators if someone dies, as they all have the motivation to explore the unknown and mysterious. The sole exceptions are the mummy and Raphael Tymonti. The mummy's stats are exactly like those in the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook with the addition of access to spells of the Keeper's choosing. Tymonti is a special case; see his notes for details.

### Dr. Archibald Smythe, Egyptologist

A well-traveled man in his 30's who is obsessed with the culture and discoveries of Ancient Egypt, and has a clear passion for what he does. He received an excellent education at Oxford University and has made it his life's work to uncover the mysteries of the ancient world.

Dr. Smythe has been to Egypt on various archaeological digs countless times, and has more than a few stories to tell about them, both mundane and occult. His skill at deciphering hieroglyphs is unsurpassed in his field, and he has a reputation for quick turnaround in obtaining results.

He joined the Order when he had a strange run-in during a dig with something that he described as "a rubbery dog-like man" (a ghou), which he refers to as a Child of Anubis for lack of any other descriptor. He has seen them several times since then in local graveyards, but has never been able to prove to others that these beings exist. If given the chance, he would gladly study these beings that dwell amongst the dead.

STR 40    CON 55    SIZ 50    DEX 45    INT 60  
 APP 50    POW 40    EDU 60    SAN 35    HP 10  
 DB: 0    Build: 0    Move: 7    MP: 8    Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl                      35% (17/7), damage 1D3

Armor: none.

Skills: Other Language (Hieroglyphs) 60%, Anthropology 45%, History 65%, Occult (Egyptian Mythology) 75%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%.

### Clarence MacClinton, Scottish Socialite

A visiting member of another social club in Scotland, the Stem and Thorn Society. His society is dedicated to the preservation of Scottish history and lore, including occult and supernatural legends. He's a rather handsome and dashing young man and been invited for the mummy unwrapping to tell stories from his homeland. He is quite the story-teller, too, and may even tell of legends from his hometown... Otherwise, he's a bit of a fun-loving prankster and likes to mess with gullible people, however it's all in good fun.

STR 55    CON 60    SIZ 55    DEX 65    INT 50  
 APP 70    POW 50    EDU 40    SAN 50    HP 12  
 DB: 0    Build: 0    Move: 7    MP: 10    Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl                      55% (17/7), damage 1D3

Armor: none.

Skills: Charm 50%, Fast Talk 75%, History 55%, Occult 35%, Listen 45%, Spot Hidden 50%.

### Isadora Camilla Turner, Actress

A stage actress, she has taken roles in several productions and is indeed a celebrity of a guest at the Order's meetings. She only appears infrequently because of her duties to the stage, but she wouldn't miss the mummy unwrapping for the world.

Isadora is friendly, elegant, and very beautiful, but a bit oblivious and naïve at times. She attempts to befriend everyone she meets, and usually succeeds because of her easy-going charm. She also nurtures a superstitious nature as many actors and actresses are wont, but she adores hearing ghost stories and scary tales.

***A note: Isadora's favorite color happens to be golden-yellow, but she knows nothing about a certain play concerning a certain yellow monarch. In fact, she could serve as the perfect red herring for paranoid Investigators with the Yellow Sign on the brain, or she could lead into a Hastur-related plot. Alternately, she can lead into any other connection with the theater and its backstage secrets.***

STR 45    CON 50    SIZ 45    DEX 70    INT 60  
 APP 70    POW 45    EDU 45    SAN 45    HP 10  
 DB: 0    Build: 0    Move: 7    MP: 8    Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl                      55% (17/7), damage 1D3

Armor: none.

Skills: Sleight of Hand 55%, Art/Craft (Acting) 65%, Listen 45%, Stealth 45%, Charm 60%, Fast Talk 60%.

### August Willoughby, Friendly Rival

A shrewd but charming man who loves a good mystery. August fancies himself a bit of an amateur Sherlock Holmes, except he investigates occult-related things. Most of these prove to be fake, giving him a reputation as a debunker of scam artists and snake oil salesmen. He's friendly, blond, curious, and well-spoken – the perfect Investigator type. He loves a nice Port Red and a good read by the fireplace.

If not used as an Investigator, the relationship between him and the Investigators should be one of friendly rivalry and one-upmanship. They are acquaintances with him, but Willoughby prefers to work alone. He is often looking into new leads and can tip the Investigators off as to these leads. His skills can also be plied in interpreting clues the Investigators are stumped by.

STR 55    CON 60    SIZ 50    DEX 55    INT 80  
 APP 60    POW 50    EDU 60    SAN 50    HP 12  
 DB: 0    Build: 0    Move: 7    MP: 10    Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl                      55% (17/7), damage 1D3

Armor: none.

Skills: Charm 65%, Persuade 75%, History 50%, Occult 55%, Listen 45%, Spot Hidden 50%, Astronomy 45%.

### Raphael A. Tymonti, Eccentric Occultist

Raphael is apparently a younger gentleman around 27 years of age, quite wealthy, and well-spoken. He is of Italian descent but has no accent. He is tall, slender, brunet, and always seems to be lost in thought behind his wireframe glasses. His looks are deceiving however, for he is actually Nyarlathotep in disguise, looking into the Order to make sure that none of the members are getting too close to uncovering any of his plans. Once the Investigators begin speaking of the occult, however, he takes a keen interest in them.

Raphael talks quite quickly and speaks much of the sciences and occult, as he nurtures an interest in them – especially those concerning astronomy, chemistry, and the nascent field of psychology (which is incredibly primitive at this time). He believes there is an intertwining between them, and because of his intellect his somewhat nutty ideas can be hard to follow. He is liable to smooth-talk any ladies in the party, and is generally quite likeable. However, they should be wary of him, because even though he may prove helpful, the leads he provides always have some sort of hidden danger he conveniently “forgets” to mention.

STR 60    CON 95    SIZ 55    DEX 95    INT 430  
 APP 90    POW 500    EDU N/A    SAN N/A    HP 15  
 DB: 0    Build: 0    Move: 12    MP: 12    Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1.

Brawl                      100% (50/20), damage 1D3

Cane                        100% (50/20), damage 1d6

Armor: None, but if slain, he will become a more monstrous form that causes 1D10/1D100 SAN loss.

Skills: Knows any and all skills at 100%, but obfuscates this fact in this form.

Spells: Knows all spells, but won't use any of them here.



## Egyptomania, Secret Societies, and Magic

It is the 1890's, and the Order of the Midnight Circle is the premiere social club for ladies and gentlemen who wish to discuss the occult. A perfect fit for any Investigator, surely! But when a scheduled mummy unwrapping party occurs at such a locale, surrounded by those who truly believe in the unearthly and paranormal, events rapidly become stranger than fiction.

The Unravelling is a starter scene for games in the Cthulhu Gaslight setting, perfect for introducing new Investigators through a pre-made secret society, the Order of the Midnight Circle. It is presented as part of The Miskatonic Files, a set of short scenes and utilities for Keepers in need of a little extra sparkle for their games.

