

The Hound

A one-act play

Adaptation of the H.P. Lovecraft story by Rom Watson

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Cast

HOWARD, male, late 20's to late 30's

ST. JOHN [Sinjin], male, late 20's to late 30's

CRIBBINS, male, late 50's to late 60's, butler

The location: England.

The time: 1924.

The action takes place on a unit set that allows for all three locations.

The stage is dark to indicate a passageway in a crypt. ST. JOHN [pronounced Sinjin], enters, followed by HOWARD. They both use flashlights to light their way. Howard stops.

HOWARD

I'm cold. How many more coffins are we going to have to open?

Seeing that Howard has stopped, Sinjin stops.

SINJIN

As many as it takes.

HOWARD

You said you knew how to locate it.

SINJIN

No, I said I knew he was from Holland. I didn't realize there would be more than one Dutch corpse down here.

HOWARD

For future reference, people from Holland die all the time. Just like the rest of us.

SINJIN

Why are you getting testy? You love robbing graves.

HOWARD

I beg your pardon?

SINJIN

You're like a child on Christmas morning. You'd open all of them if I let you.

HOWARD

That is not true. I do not love robbing graves. I love finding precious artifacts. I'm . . .an archeologist.

SINJIN

Ha! Howard, you're a thief. Just like I am.

HOWARD

I may be just like you, but I am not a thief. I'm a collector.

SINJIN

Collecting from the dead, without their permission.

HOWARD

If they're dead you don't need their permission. It's better than shopping.

SINJIN

(Chuckling to himself.)

Better than shopping.

HOWARD

Besides, the dead don't need possessions.

SINJIN

And you do?

HOWARD

You love collecting as much as I do.

SINJIN

Just keep looking for a Dutch name.

They cross to another part of the stage and come upon an alcove containing two coffins. One lies on the floor, and the other is propped up against it at an angle.

SINJIN (CONT'D)

Odd.

HOWARD

Do you think someone might have beaten us to it?

They approach the coffins.

SINJIN

Look for the name.

Howard reads a plaque on the coffin.

HOWARD

"Koenraad van Noort."

SINJIN

Sounds Dutch.

Sinjin sets his flashlight down on the floor and aims it toward the upper coffin. He opens the lid of the coffin. The skeleton inside wears a chain about its neck, at the bottom of which hangs an amulet.

HOWARD

The amulet!

Howard gingerly reaches behind the skeleton's neck and unfastens the chain. He holds the amulet in the palm of his hand and shines his flashlight on it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Sinjin, it's beautiful.

SINJIN

And frightening at the same time.

HOWARD

Our favorite.

They smile at each other.

SINJIN

It's just like the book described it.

HOWARD

Which book?

SINJIN

The Necronomicon.

HOWARD

What did it say?

SINJIN

A crouching hound or sphinx, carved from jade.

HOWARD

It's exquisite.

SINJIN

Yes, but . . .something's not right; this was too easy.

HOWARD

Easy?! We've been searching for hours.

SINJIN

But why are these two coffins by themselves, and why is this one propped up against the other?

HOWARD

I don't know--

SINJIN

And the skeleton. It's in surprisingly good shape for being as old as it is.

HOWARD

Perhaps he took vitamins. [VIT - uh - mins]

SINJIN

And why did the lid open with so little effort?

HOWARD

It doesn't matter now, Sinjin. We have it. Let's go.

Sinjin closes the lid of the coffin and grabs his flashlight from the floor. They return the way they came. After a few steps they hear the sound of a hound's baying. They freeze, look at each other, then exit. The sound of bats can be heard.

SCENE 2

The library of their home. Besides containing books, this library houses a collection of skulls, headstones, small statues, and perhaps even some mummified remains, including heads preserved in various stages of dissolution. On a table is a decanter of brandy and some glasses.

They cross to the library and Howard sets his flashlight on a wooden chest that serves as an end table. They cross to the mantel above the fire place on which sits a dome bell jar or a display case. Howard takes the amulet from his pocket and places it in the bell jar or case to display it.

HOWARD
(To the amulet.)

Welcome to your new home.

SINJIN
(Admiring the amulet.)

This is our best piece yet.

HOWARD
(Admiring Sinjin.)

I used to fear I would never find someone like myself.

SINJIN

Many of us don't.

HOWARD

I can't imagine my life if I hadn't met you.

SINJIN

You don't have to.

Sinjin smiles. CRIBBINS enters. He is haughty
but also dryly amusing.

CRIBBINS

Your coats, gentleman.

They removes their coats and hand them to
Cribbins.

CRIBBINS (CONT'D)

I see you've been on another of your . . .excursions.

HOWARD

Yes, we've just--

CRIBBINS

I don't want to know about your unnatural personal experiences and adventures. Simply
allow me to hang up your coats.

SINJIN

After you admire our acquisition.

He gestures to the amulet and Cribbins reluctantly examines it. He is impressed in spite of himself.

CRIBBINS

Oh my.

HOWARD

What do you think of our latest trophy?

CRIBBINS

Trophy? You mean your latest addition to this museum of terror and death.

SINJIN

Yes, what do you think of it?

CRIBBINS

The carving is exquisite. And yet it fills me with the blackest of apprehensions.

HOWARD

Me too. Isn't it wonderful?

CRIBBINS

(To Sinjin.)

Sir, your late father would be very displeased that you've turned your ancestral home into a charnel house.

HOWARD

A what?

SINJIN

It's a vault where they deposit bones. But you exaggerate, Cribbins; we don't have *that* many bones.

CRIBBINS

But you do have unwholesome ideas, satanic tastes, and,
(Looking at Howard.)

Unnatural appetites.

HOWARD

(Nodding in agreement and admiring Sinjin.)

Yes. Isn't he the best?

Cribbins rolls his eyes and gives up.

CRIBBINS
 Shall I make tea?

SINJIN
 No, Cribbins, we'll have brandy.

CRIBBINS
 Very good, sir.

Cribbins exits with the coats.

HOWARD
 Was he always like this?

SINJIN
 Yes, even when I was a child.

They continue to admire the amulet.

HOWARD
 What else did the book say about it?

SINJIN
 Not much.

He takes the Necronomicon from a shelf, sets it on the table and opens it where marked by an ancient ribbon.

SINJIN (CONT'D)
 If I recall, there was only a paragraph.

Cribbins enters and pours them each a glass of brandy as they begin to peruse the book.

CRIBBINS
 Your brandy, sirs.

He hands them their drinks.

HOWARD
 Thank you, Cribbins.

SINJIN
 Thank you. Have one yourself why don't you.

CRIBBINS

No, sir, but I appreciate the offer.

SINJIN

(Toasting.)

To the amulet.

HOWARD

The amulet.

They clink their glasses together and sip the brandy. They hear a scratching sound at the door. All three freeze, then slowly turn their heads and look, silently listening.

SINJIN

Must be rats.

CRIBBINS

(Insulted.)

There are no rats in this house. I and the cats see to that.

They hear the sound again and all three cautiously move toward the door. Behind them, a shadow darkens the window and momentarily covers the moon. They do not notice. The scratching sound is now at the window. The shadow moves on and they turn to look. They hear the flapping of wings and move to the window, puzzled by the sound. Cribbins suddenly realizes the cause.

CRIBBINS (CONT'D)

Oh, not to worry. It's merely bats.

HOWARD

Bats?! Do something about them.

CRIBBINS

I can rid the house of rats, but can do nothing about bats.

HOWARD

Why not?

CRIBBINS

Because cats cannot fly.

The shadow once again moves across the window and this time they see it.

HOWARD

What was that?

SINJIN
(To Cribbins.)

Is the gardener about?

CRIBBINS

Not at this hour.

They again hear something at the door. They listen.

HOWARD

Is it a dog?

SINJIN

We don't have a dog.

HOWARD

I know that. I meant, could it be a stray dog.

CRIBBINS

We're too isolated for a stray to wander all the way out here.

HOWARD
(Apprehensive.)

You were about to tell me what that book said about the amulet.

SINJIN

Yes.

(He crosses to the open book and reads.)

"The amulet depicts a crouching winged hound or sphinx with a semi-canine face, carved in antique fashion from a small piece of green jade."

HOWARD

Go on.

SINJIN

That's all.

HOWARD

There must be more.

He goes to the book and turns the page, but the next page begins a new topic.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hold on.

He examines the edge of the paper and is able to separate two pages.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

They were stuck together.

(Reading from the newly accessed page.)

“This amulet is the ghastly soul-symbol of the corpse-eating cult of Leng in Central Asia, a supernatural manifestation of the souls of those who cannibalized the dead.”

They again hear scratching at the door.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Do you think it might be cursed?

A moment of silence as they look at each other in turn.

CRIBBINS

I shall have that drink now.

He crosses to the brandy and pours himself a drink. He downs it quickly.

SINJIN

(Reading from the book.)

“Souls of ghosts can be trapped in objects such as those symbolized in talismans.”
“Those of the Leng cult were described as dead, fleshless monstrosities, their teeth sharpened on centuries of corpses.”

CRIBBINS

I don't like the sound of that.

HOWARD

Is this amulet mentioned in any of our other books?

SINJIN

Yes, in one other volume.

CRIBBINS

Let's get a second opinion, shall we?

SINJIN

By all means. I'll find the book.

Sinjin exits.

CRIBBINS

(Accusingly.)

What ominous secret of the earth have you brought into this house?

HOWARD

It . . . may be nothing more than a beautiful artifact.

CRIBBINS

Or it could be the cause of some creeping and appalling doom.

HOWARD

You read too much Edgar Allan Poe.

CRIBBINS

I do not read authors of such vulgarity.

They hear the sound of demonic baying.

CRIBBINS (CONT'D)

You may have aroused the presence of some malign being whose nature we can only guess.

HOWARD

Stop implying that it's all my fault.

CRIBBINS

Isn't it?

HOWARD

No.

CRIBBINS

Until he met you there were no mysterious excursions in the dead of night.
(Gesturing to the objects in the room.)

No ghastly collection of eldritch relics.

HOWARD

And you think that's due to my influence?

CRIBBINS

Before you came to live here he had no need for decadent stimuli; for dark excitements or morbid titillations.

HOWARD

Are you referring to our bedroom arrangements?

This flusters Cribbins, as he is not used to such things being openly discussed, but he soon regains his composure and continues.

CRIBBINS

I am referring to the outrage you commit upon those who cannot retaliate.
(Howard doesn't understand.)

Your blasphemous pillaging.

HOWARD

(He understands.)

Oh, you mean the grave robbing.

CRIBBINS

Yes.

HOWARD

What gave us away?

CRIBBINS

Your coats. When you return from your midnight sojourns, they exude the stomach-churning stench of death.

HOWARD

Aahh. I suppose we've gotten used to those odors.

CRIBBINS

I have not and never will.

HOWARD

Sinjin and I appreciate your discretion.

CRIBBINS

I pride myself in being discrete. But you must stop leading Sinjin down this path.

HOWARD

Cribbins, down whatever path Sinjin and I walk, he has always been the leader.

(He crosses to the brandy and pours
himself another drink.)

He always will be. We like it that way.

Howard drinks.

CRIBBINS

Use your influence to make him stop.

HOWARD

And give up the excitement?

CRIBBINS

Death is not a thrill. It is not some carnival amusement.

HOWARD

It is when you get close to death but then don't die.

CRIBBINS

If you do not put a stop to this addiction to danger, you will both come to a bad end.

HOWARD

Thank you, Cribbins, for your concern.

The sound of baying is heard again, closer this
time. It startles Cribbins.

CRIBBINS

Dear Lord.

They hear screams. It is Sinjin. Howard grabs
his flashlight from the end table and exits,
followed by Cribbins. The lights fade to black.

SCENE 3

The lights rise to half as Howard and Cribbins
enter and cross to another part of the stage. They
find Sinjin on the floor, mangled and bloody.

Howard hands the flashlight to Cribbins and kneels down.

HOWARD

Sinjin! What happened?

SINJIN

I was attacked.

CRIBBINS

Who . . . what did this to you, sir?

Cribbins and Howard look around for a culprit.

SINJIN

It's gone. But it wants the amulet back.

CRIBBINS

Shall I call for the police?

SINJIN

No, our library is filled with stolen treasure.

HOWARD

I'll fetch a doctor.

SINJIN

No! Get the amulet. Now.

Howard exits to the library.

SINJIN (CONT'D)

Thank you, Cribbins, for all your years of excellent service.

CRIBBINS

It was my pleasure, sir. Now save your strength.

Sinjin opens his coat to show Cribbins the severity of his wounds. Cribbins covers his mouth in horror and turns away.

SINJIN

I may not have much time left. You must make Howard return the amulet. Or he will die too.

CRIBBINS

Yes sir.

SINJIN

Promise me.

CRIBBINS

I promise. Is there anything else, sir?

SINJIN

Tell Howard --no, never mind; he knows how I feel about him.

Howard returns with the amulet. He takes
Sinjin's hand.

HOWARD

I have the amulet.

SINJIN

Return it to its owner. The hound will be tired because it just fed, so you must do it now.
Before his master releases him again.

HOWARD

You saw your attacker?

SINJIN

It was too dark. But it wasn't human, I know that. It seemed to be some great,
monstrous hound.

HOWARD

I . . . I don't think I can do this.

SINJIN

Howard. You will.

HOWARD

Sinjin--

SINJIN

I know you. And I know you can do this. You're a lot stronger than you let on.

HOWARD

I can't leave you like this.

SINJIN
(Weaker now.)

I won't be here when you leave.

HOWARD

What?

SINJIN

I'm afraid this is the end for me.

HOWARD

Oh don't say that, surely a doctor--

SINJIN
(Perhaps he coughs up some blood.)

It's too late for a doctor.

Howard reaches a hand out to open Sinjin's coat
but Sinjin stops him.

SINJIN (CONT'D)

No. I don't want you to remember me like that. Remember me at my best.

Perhaps Sinjin starts to choke on his blood.

HOWARD

How can I do otherwise? When you were sick with a fever and a hacking cough, or covered with mud when you'd fallen from your horse, you were always at your best.

SINJIN

I was so lucky.

HOWARD

No luckier than I.

Sinjin reaches up and touches Howard's face
with his hand. He smiles, lowers his hand,
closes his eyes and dies. Howard makes a
sound, then covers his mouth to keep from
sobbing. Cribbins puts a hand on his shoulder.
Howard stands.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

How will I live without him?

CRIBBINS

Though it seems impossible, you will do it. Slowly, and painfully at first, you will live on. And with time, your sorrow will become less of a burden and more of a privilege.

HOWARD

He was . . . more than a . . .

CRIBBINS

I know.

HOWARD

There won't be another like him.

CRIBBINS

Then cherish your memories. They can last a lifetime.

HOWARD

You've suffered a loss of your own?

CRIBBINS

More than once.

HOWARD

I hope I survive as well as you did.

CRIBBINS

If you don't return that amulet to its rightful owner, you're not going to survive.

HOWARD

And Sinjin?

CRIBBINS

I will take care of him. Go.

HOWARD

I . . .

CRIBBINS

(Firmly.)

Go now. The longer you delay, the more time it has to strike again.

Cribbins hands the flashlight to Howard.
Howard turns away, puts the amulet in his
pocket and takes a few steps to leave. He stops
and turns back to Cribbins.

I can't do it. HOWARD

What? CRIBBINS

I can't go back there. HOWARD

It must be done. CRIBBINS

I . . . I need you to come with me. HOWARD

Me? CRIBBINS

You're the most capable man I know. HOWARD

Yes, I dare say I am. CRIBBINS

Please. I can't go back there alone. HOWARD

If I do this, I will deserve an increase in my wages. CRIBBINS

Yes. You will. And I will pay you gladly. HOWARD

I owe money. Five hundred pounds. CRIBBINS

Five hundred pounds? HOWARD

I have a weakness for horse racing. CRIBBINS

HOWARD

Fine. I'll pay off your debt.

CRIBBINS

(Dreading the task at hand.)

I was afraid you would say that. Alright then; there's nothing else for it. Lead the way.

HOWARD

We can't leave Sinjin here.

CRIBBINS

There's nothing to be done for him now. I'll take care of his remains upon our return.

HOWARD

At least cover his face.

Cribbins takes a handkerchief from his pocket
and drapes it over Sinjin's face.

CRIBBINS

That will have to do. We must go. Now.

The lights fade to black as they exit.

SCENE 4

The alcove containing the two coffins. Howard
enters followed by Cribbins.

HOWARD

(Relieved.)

It's just as we left it.

CRIBBINS

I should think it would be.

HOWARD

I was afraid that . . . I don't know what I was afraid of.

Howard sets his flashlight down on the floor and
aims it toward the upper coffin.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Open the lid please.

CRIBBINS

Why do I have to be the one to open the lid?

HOWARD

Would you rather replace the amulet?

CRIBBINS

I shall open the lid.

Howard takes the amulet out of his pocket as Cribbins opens the lid of the coffin. The skeleton is now covered in caked blood, with bits of hair and flesh amidst the blood. The eye sockets glow with phosphorescence, and the teeth are covered with blood.

HOWARD

Oh no.

CRIBBINS

Good Lord. It's covered in blood.

HOWARD

The skeleton was clean when we took the amulet.

CRIBBINS

That was before it . . .dined.

HOWARD

Sinjin thought he was attacked by a hound, but this *is* the hound.

They notice the skeleton's retinue of huge, sinewy bats huddled along the lining of the coffin.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

What are these things? They weren't here before.

CRIBBINS

(Gasps.)

Those are bats.

HOWARD
(Loudly.)

Bats?!

CRIBBINS
(In a stage whisper.)

Try not to disturb them.

HOWARD
(In a stage whisper.)

Right.

He gingerly reaches his hands around the neck of the skeleton and fastens the two ends of the chain together. Suddenly the skeleton reaches out a gory, filthy claw.

HOWARD & CRIBBINS
(Screaming.)

Uahhhhh!

HOWARD
(To the skeleton.)

You have it back now. Leave us alone.

A moment of silence.

CRIBBINS
It no longer moves. Perhaps it has been placated.

HOWARD
Let's hope so. What more can it want?

From the jaws of the skeleton emerges a deep baying, as from some gigantic hound. Howard and Cribbins run off and the lights fade to black.

SCENE 5

The library of the manor-house. Howard and Cribbins enter. Howard sinks into a chair.

CRIBBINS
Your coat, sir?

HOWARD
(Distracted.)

What? Oh, yes. Thank you.

Howard stands and turns his back to Cribbins, who slips Howard's coat off his shoulders. Cribbins carefully folds the coat over his arm, then watches as Howard crosses to the table and attempts to pour himself a drink. However, his hands are shaking and he sets the glass and the brandy down.

CRIBBINS
He was right you know. You are much stronger than you let on.

HOWARD
I was terrified. My hands are still shaking.

CRIBBINS
Yes, but you displayed courage in the face of fear. Sinjin would have been proud.

HOWARD
Thank you. Truth be known, I'm a bit proud of myself. It's good to know I can do what has to be done. No matter how unpleasant.

Cribbins crosses to him, pours the drink and hands it to him.

CRIBBINS
Here you are sir.

HOWARD
Thank you.

He drinks it.

CRIBBINS
I think now I understand, sir.

HOWARD
Understand what?

CRIBBINS
The excitement, sir. The thrill.

HOWARD

You found that ordeal thrilling?!?

CRIBBINS

No, it was horrifying. A ghastly experience I hope never to repeat.

(Brief pause.)

And yet . . .there was a moment where I was reminded of a horse race. When the ponies are heading into the home stretch, there is an electric charge that runs through the crowd.

HOWARD

I see you do have a taste for thrill. Though I'm surprised at your fondness for a vice such as horse racing.

CRIBBINS

It is not a vice. It's . . .an indulgence.

HOWARD

Perhaps I shall have to accompany you the next time you go to the races.

CRIBBINS

If you wish. It might be a good substitute for your midnight excursions.

HOWARD

Perhaps it might.

CRIBBINS

And it would be during the day.

HOWARD

I would like that.

Howard notices the collection of artifacts and moves toward it, taking it all in as if seeing it for the first time.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Cribbins?

CRIBBINS

Yes sir?

HOWARD

I don't think I can find much delight in these any longer. Would you help me pack them away?

CRIBBINS

Of course. With pleasure, sir.

Howard opens the wooden chest and one by one begins to place the skulls, mummified remains and small statues into it. Simultaneously, Cribbins sets the coat on the back of a chair and helps him. After a moment, Cribbins speaks.

CRIBBINS (CONT'D)

He loved you.

HOWARD

I know. But thank you for saying so.

They pack a few more items.

CRIBBINS

We'll need another container for the rest. I'll get one from the cellar.

HOWARD

Please.

Cribbins takes the coat from the chair and moves to exit.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Will you see to the arrangements?

CRIBBINS

Of course sir. First thing tomorrow morning.

HOWARD

I want him cremated.

CRIBBINS

Were those his wishes?

HOWARD

Those are my wishes. And should you survive me, I want cremation for myself as well.

CRIBBINS

I understand.

HOWARD

I will never enter a crypt or a graveyard again. Alive or dead.

CRIBBINS

Very good sir.

HOWARD

We will scatter his ashes to the winds.

CRIBBINS

As you wish. I will serve you as I served him.

HOWARD

Thank you, Cribbins.

Cribbins exits. Howard puts another item or two in the chest. He hears the baying sound and freezes. He hears it again, closer this time. He goes to a drawer and takes out a pistol. He checks to make sure it's loaded. The door suddenly opens revealing the skeleton, wearing the amulet and baying. Perhaps Howard screams. Then he points the gun at the skeleton. He fires a shot at the skeleton to no effect. Silence. More baying. Before he can pull the trigger a second time, Cribbins enters. He sees the skeleton, grabs the poker from the fireplace and tosses it to Howard. Howard rushes to the doorway and uses the poker to decapitate the skeleton. Cribbins slams the door shut and locks it. They both take a moment to catch their breath.

CRIBBINS

He won't be bothering us anymore.

HOWARD

Cribbins. You did it.

CRIBBINS

You did it, sir. I merely handed you the correct weapon.

HOWARD

And in so doing, saved my life.

CRIBBINS

I had no choice. You promised to pay off my debt. You can't do that if you're a mangled piece of meat.

Howard sets down the gun and the poker, takes his wallet out of his pocket, removes five hundred pounds in currency, and hands it to Cribbins.

HOWARD

Money well spent.

Cribbins puts the money in his pocket.

CRIBBINS

Thank you sir. Will there be anything else?

HOWARD

Yes. I am not going to be able to sleep, not after what's happened. Do you mind waiting up with me?

CRIBBINS

Not at all.

They pull two chairs up to the table and sit.

CRIBBINS (CONT'D)

Do you play whist?

HOWARD

Doesn't that require four players?

CRIBBINS

German whist requires only two.

HOWARD

Teach it to me.

CRIBBINS

My pleasure.

HOWARD

My hands are still shaking. You'll have to deal the cards.

Cribbins takes a deck of playing cards from the table and begins to shuffle.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You're good to wait up with me.

CRIBBINS

Good? No. I'm afraid I have an ulterior motive.

HOWARD

You want to play for money, is that it? You intend to fleece me?

CRIBBINS

(Smiling.)

I intend to win. We can play for a penny a trick. I would hardly call that fleecing.

HOWARD

I'm already in your debt.

CRIBBINS

Not financially. Not yet.

HOWARD

Deal the cards.

Cribbins begins to deal the cards.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Do you think it's over?

They pause and listen. They hear nothing. Cribbins raises his eyebrows to indicate he's not sure, then continues to deal the cards and the lights fade to black. End of play.

[Author's Note: The effect of the skeleton reaching out its hand can be achieved by installing a button or lever on the inside of the coffin behind the skeleton's neck. After fastening the amulet's chain, the actor playing Howard presses the button or moves the lever, causing the skeleton's hand to spring forward. Perhaps the actor can make it look like the skeleton is grabbing his open coat, and then grabs both the hand and the coat and pries them apart.]