

## THE SKULL

A radio play based on the short story by Philip K. Dick

Adapted by Jake Lewis

### Cast of characters (in order of appearance)

Guard

Conger

Speaker

Ed Davies

Mrs. Appleton

Lora Appleton

Bill Willet

Sheriff Duff

Doctor

Mrs. Conger

Mr. Conger

### Scene 1

*SFX of a prison, followed by heavy boots walking on a metal floor.*

1 GUARD: Open 51-A!

*SFX of a prison cell gate sliding open.*

2 GUARD: Conger. You're wanted.

3 CONGER: I was wanted. That's what put me here. But you're the first to tell me I'm still wanted.

4 GUARD: I want to give you a swift kick in the rear end. But The Speaker requests your attendance.

5 CONGER: But I was just about to take afternoon tea with Gillespie, followed by book club with Chaves.

6 GUARD: Chaves can't read his way out of a bathroom toilet. Move, now!

7 CONGER: Alright, alright. I'm coming. That beatin' you gave me a few days ago slowed me down some.

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*SFX of the bed squeaking as CONGER rises and follows the guard down the corridor. There are assorted cheers and hoots as CONGER makes his way past the other prisoners.*

1 CONGER: Can you give me some idea about what The Speaker wants of me?

*The GUARD says nothing.*

2 CONGER: Yeah. Figured. You've got a great poker face, Friedkin. And that's probably the only nice thing anyone has ever said about your pucker.

*Their walking has stopped.*

3 GUARD: Get in there before I put your face in a world of hurt.

*SFX of a door opening and CONGER being pushed through. A moment later, the door slams shut.*

4 CONGER: What is this place? I can't see a darn thing...

5 SPEAKER: (Booms and echoes) Mr. Conger, thank you for coming.

6 CONGER: Oh, uh...sure. Not like I had much of a choice. Why's it so dark in here? Trying to scare me? Or hide your identity?

7 SPEAKER: Who we are is of no concern to you. You can call us your personal saviors, if you like.

*SFX: There is soft chuckling from multiple people.*

8 CONGER: Saviors, huh? I've never been much of a religious fella. But if you can get me out of here, I'll call you anything you want.

9 SPEAKER: Hmm. Is that so? Then you may like to hear about an opportunity we have for you.

10 CONGER: I'm listening.

11 SPEAKER: Before you came to this institution, you were a very successful trader of goods – all illegal – but quite profitable.

12 CONGER: I was employee of the month for a year straight!

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1       SPEAKER: And you have served two of your... (SFX of looking through papers) eight year sentence, correct?

2       CONGER: Has it only been two? Feels like 1, what with you folks treatin' me so good.

3       SPEAKER: I also see here that you were quite skilled at hunting when you were on the outside...trapping, waiting in the bush, stalking....things of that nature?

4       CONGER: "Waitin' in the bush" just sounds wrong when it comes out of your mouth. No offense meant, o'course.

5       SPEAKER: The Council has a very important, yet delicate, situation that we think may appeal to someone of your...talents. It is my hope that you will demonstrate your loyalty to us, now. There are always ways for citizens to restore themselves, to show their devotion to their society. For you I think this would be a very good chance. I seriously doubt that a better one will come. And for your efforts there will be quite a restitution, of course.

*SFX of more soft chuckling.*

6       CONGER: Alright. Enough of the fancy talk! Who do you want me to kill?

7       SPEAKER: All things in due time...

*Music vamp*

### Scene 2

*SFX of the rotors powering down.*

8       GUARD: We're here. Get out.

9       CONGER: My mother always said pleases and thank yous go a long way.

*SFX of car doors opening and several people getting out.*

10      CONGER: It's cold out. A good cold. Not like the cold in my cell or in the yard. And look at that moon! You don't realize you miss such a thing until you can't see it no more.

*SFX: Sound of walking.*

11      CONGER: Where are we? What is this place? It feels familiar.

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1 GUARD: This way. Through that door.

2 CONGER: A church?? I told you guys I'm not a religious man.

3 GUARD: You will be soon. This is The First Church. We're expected.

4 CONGER: You're taking me into a church armed like that? Something tells me God won't look too kindly on that.

5 GUARD: You can never be too careful.

*SFX of doors being pushed open, and hurried footsteps.*

6 CONGER: Now wait a minute. Is it a pedo I'm taking out? Some reverend with a thing for little boys?

7 GUARD: Ssh! Keep your voice down! The Faithful will be flocking here soon. Through this door.

*SFX of another set of doors being opened and then quickly shut behind them.*

8 GUARD: It's in here somewhere...Our information tells us it's hidden...

9 CONGER: Look, I gotta' bad feeling about this...

10 GUARD: Are you a believer in The Founder? A hunter...a killer like you?

11 CONGER: What? No! I don't subscribe to that non-violence and resignation to death stuff, but...

12 GUARD: But what?

13 CONGER: I was just taught never to mix with them. They can't be reasoned with. They can do funny things to you.

14 GUARD: We do not want you to kill anyone...here. We've found that killing them only increases their fold. No, we're here to get something that will help you identify your man. We wouldn't want you killing the wrong person.

15 CONGER: I don't make mistakes. Just give me his name.

16 GUARD: We don't have it. We only know that he can be identified by certain objects, found here, and—

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*SFX of a wall sliding back.*

1 GUARD: Aha! A secret compartment! And there it is!

2 CONGER: A skull! A skeleton!

3 GUARD: The man you seek has been dead for two centuries. This is all that is left of him, and all you will have to find him.

4 CONGER: But...how can I kill a dead man?

*SFX of voices nearby.*

5 GUARD: That's up to you to figure out. Come, we must go. They already suspect we are here!

*SFX of them hurrying out, getting in the car, and lifting off.*

*Music vamp.*

### Scene 3

*SFX of a car taking off.*

6 CONGER: That was a close one! This is some fancy car you got. Who's bankrolling you? And who were those people chasing after us? What is going on?

7 GUARD: Just shut up and watch the screen. The Speaker will be with you in a moment.

*SFX of signal coming in.*

8 SPEAKER: Mr. Conger, please allow me to explain some of the relevant points.

9 CONGER: The floor is yours, chief.

10 SPEAKER: It was in the twentieth century that the Movement began—during one of the periodic wars. The Movement developed rapidly, feeding on the general sense of futility, the realization that each war was breeding greater war, with no end in sight. The Movement posed a simple answer to the problem: Without military preparations—weapons—there could be no war. And without machinery and complex scientific technocracy there could be no weapons.

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1        CONGER: Makes sense to me. So what happened? I don't know if you're aware, but I've been locked up for a while.

2        SPEAKER: The Movement preached that you couldn't stop war by planning for it. They preached that man was losing to his machinery and science, that it was getting away from him, pushing him into greater and greater wars. Down with society, they shouted. Down with factories and science! A few more wars and there wouldn't be much left of the world.

3        CONGER: And this Founder guy—

4        SPEAKER: The Founder was an obscure person from a small town in the American North West. We don't even know his name. All we know is that one day he appeared, preaching a doctrine of non-violence, non-resistance; no fighting, no paying taxes for guns, no research except for medicine. Live out your life quietly, tending your garden, staying out of public affairs; mind your own business. Be obscure, unknown, poor. Give away most of your possessions, leave the city. At least that was what developed from what he told the people.

5        CONGER: Seems a little naive, if you ask me.

6        SPEAKER: The Founder preached this doctrine, or the germ of it; there's no telling how much the faithful have added themselves. The local authorities picked him up at once, of course. Apparently they were convinced that he meant it; he was never released. He was put to death, and his body buried secretly. It seemed that the cult was finished.

7        CONGER: O....K....so what am I doing here? Robbing a corpse?

8        SPEAKER: Unfortunately, some of his disciples reported seeing him after the date of his death. The rumor spread; he had conquered death, he was divine. It took hold, grew. And here we are today, with a First Church, obstructing all social progress, destroying society, sowing the seeds of anarchy—

9        CONGER: But the wars...

10       SPEAKER: The wars? Well, there were no more wars. It must be acknowledged that the elimination of war was the direct result of non-violence practiced on a general scale. But we can take a more objective view of war today. What was so terrible about it? War had a profound selective value, perfectly in accord with the teachings of Darwin and Mendel and others. Without war the mass of useless, incompetent mankind, without training or intelligence, is permitted to grow and expand unchecked. War acted to reduce their numbers; like storms and earthquakes and droughts, it was nature's way of eliminating the unfit.

11       CONGER: Jesus H...

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1       SPEAKER: Without war, the lower elements of mankind have increased all out of proportion. They threaten the educated few, those with scientific knowledge and training, the ones equipped to direct society. They have no regard for science or a scientific society, based on reason. And this Movement seeks to aid and abet them. Only when scientists are in full control can the—

*SFX of car landing.*

2       CONGER: Why are we stopping? Where are we?

3       SPEAKER: You've arrived at your final destination.

4       CONGER: My what?

5       SPEAKER: The Founder only spoke once. Just once. Then he was taken away. But we are reaping the consequences to this day.

*SFX of door opening.*

6       SPEAKER: Outside your vehicle, you will find a cage. You will step into that cage and be sent back to a place called Hudson's Field, outside Denver, Colorado in August 2023. You will track down the Founder before he gives his one and only speech...and eliminate him.

*SFX of a gun being given to CONGER.*

7       GUARD: This is a SLEM-gun. Do you know how it works?

8       CONGER: Yes. I mean, I've seen it used before...

9       SPEAKER: Shoot first, ask questions later. The Founder will be unknown to these parts. Someone who seems...different.

10      CONGER: Why not just drop me right before his infamous speech? I'll go in, take him out, and then you can beam me right back here.

11      SPEAKER: If only we could, Mr. Conger! But like Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount, we do not know the exact date and time of his speech, only the approximate area.

12      CONGER: Fine, fine. But how will I recognize him?

*SFX of something being handed over.*

13      CONGER: Is this his...skull?

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1       SPEAKER: Indeed it is! You will notice how his front teeth, especially his incisors, are quite distinctive.

2       CONGER: Guess I should become a dentist.

3       SPEAKER: And let me remind you, Mr. Conger, the cage is being tracked. Don't try to do anything with it except what we are requesting. Or we will know.

4       CONGER: You have a flair for drama, anyone ever tell you that?

5       SPEAKER: We'll be awaiting the outcome. There's some philosophical doubt as to whether one can alter the past. This should answer the question once and for all. Godspeed to you, Mr. Conger.

*Music vamp*

### Scene 4

*SFX of whirly-gigs slowing.*

6       VOICE: You have arrived. Please exit the cage and proceed to complete the mission.

*SFX of decompression and door opening.*

7       CONGER: Alright, Founder, whoever you are, where are you?

*SFX of CONGER walking along the road.*

*SFX of a car approaching and slowing once it's near.*

8       ED DAVIES: Hep you, fella?

9       CONGER: Where...where I am?

10      ED DAVIES: You're in Cooper Creek, outside of Denver. Just keep headin' that way and you can't miss it. Lots of buildings.

11      CONGER: What day is it?

12      ED DAVIES: (*giggling*) Man, oh man, are you one of them hippy types? Stoned out of your mind, huh? Well, I can't fault you entirely on that end. I've been known to smoke a little grass in my free time.



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1 CONGER: Grass?

2 ED DAVIES: Wowser, you cut right to the chase, dontcha? Hop in, I'll take you down the road a stretch, at least.

3 CONGER: Thanks.

*SFX of truck door opening and then closing.*

*SFX of truck accelerating.*

4 ED DAVIES: Ed Davies. Pleased to meet you.

5 CONGER: Conger. Omar Conger.

6 ED DAVIES: Like Omar Khayyam.

7 CONGER: Who?

8 ED DAVIES: The poet! I may not look like a poetry reading man, but don't always believe what you first set eyes on.

9 CONGER: I know very little of poets. We restored very few works of art. Usually only the Church has been interested enough...Where I come from.

10 ED DAVIES: The Church, eh? I wouldn't have taken you for a religious man...

11 CONGER: I'm not.

12 ED DAVIES: "Awake! For morning in the bowl of night / Has flung the stone that puts the stars to night / And lo! The hunter of the east has caught / The Sultan's turret in a noose of light." That's a poem by the Khayyam fella.

13 CONGER: Nice I guess. Don't really understand it, though.

14 ED DAVIES: Neither do I! That's why I like it! Gives me something to chew on when I've got nothing else on my mind. Here's what I got, though: There are gods, and there are men, and some men think they're gods, but the real gods put an end to those men right fast.

15 CONGER: You got all that from that little poem?

16 ED DAVIES: Sure did.

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*Awkward silence.*

1 ED DAVIES: it looks like you could do yourself with a hot meal and some rest. What do you say to letting me bring you down by Mrs. Appleton's B&B? She's got a spare room she may be willing to loan you for the time being.

2 CONGER: B&B?

3 ED DAVIES: Oh Lordy, this is going to make for a great story over dinner!

*Music vamp.*

### Scene 5

*SFX of dinner being served.*

4 APPLETON: Mr. Conger, I'm so glad you could join us for dinner. How's the room?

5 CONGER: Good. Warm. Thanks.

6 APPLETON: Well, I'm glad! If Ed here says you're good in his book, you're good in my book!

7 ED DAVIES: Don't make me look the fool, Mr. Conger!

8 APPLETON: You do that fine without any help from me, Ed Davies.

*SFX of doorbell.*

9 LORA: That'll be Bill now!

*SFX of her going down the hall, greeting BILL, and coming back.*

10 APPLETON: You one of those progressive types?

11 BILL: Evenin', Ms. Appleton.

12 APPLETON: This is Bill Willet, Lora's fiancée. He's studying up to be a reverend.

13 CONGER: You don't say...

14 LORA: Bill, this here is Omar Conger. He's new to town.

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1 BILL: I'll say! That suit you got on sure is something. And you don't often see many men wearing a beard like that around here. As a matter of fact, I can only think of one type of people who have beards like that, and they are not welcome here. Where are you from, Mr. Conger?

2 LORA: Oh, Bill! Don't you start!

3 BILL: I'm not starting anything. Just want to make sure he's an upstanding Christian soldier if he's going to be sleeping under the same roof as my bride-to-be. Conger, huh? You're not a foreigner, are you?

4 CONGER: I'm from Oregon.

5 BILL: That's how people dress and talk in Oregon?

6 LORA: Ooh! I'm interested in accents! Talk some more.

7 CONGER: I didn't know I had one.

8 LORA: You speak funny. Slurring your words a bit.

9 ED DAVIES: You'll have to forgive her, Mr. Conger. We don't get a lot of visitors from out of town. Especially as far out of town as you.

10 BILL: And what brings you to this area, O-mar?

11 CONGER: I'm looking for a man.

12 BILL: Is he at all...like you? Then he should stick out like a sore thumb.

13 CONGER: He's a religious man.

14 BILL: Maybe I know him. I could put you two in touch with each other and the sooner you can be on your back back to Oregon, or wherever you claim to be.

15 CONGER: This man is a dangerous man of the cloth. (*Taunting.*) Do you know anyone like that, Rev?

16 BILL: If I were you, I'd leave this house before you find out. Let me show you the way.

17 CONGER: You do not want to touch me again.

18 BILL: Oh yeah? And why's that?

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1        CONGER: See this belt buckle here? If I squeeze it just a teeny bit, it's going to send out a shockwave to anyone who is touching me. This clothing you laughed at? It's fully insulated against the electricity. It was made special for me. So unless you want to get zapped into the next century – which I assure you is not a nice place – it'd be wisest to remove your hand from my shoulder and back up a few steps.

2        BILL: You're so full of–

*SFX of a loud electronic pulse.*

*SFX of BILL's body being blown backwards across the room, various screams.*

3        APPLETON: My sweet Lord!

4        LORA: What'd you do?!?

5        CONGER: I warned him.

*SFX of CONGER exiting, door to house slamming shut.*

6        ED DAVIES: Conger! Wait!

7        APPLETON: Call the sheriff!

*Music vamp.*

### Scene 6

*SFX of footsteps along a road at night. After a few moments the sound of a police car is heard approaching, sirens warning.*

8        SHERIFF: Please move to the side of the road.

*SFX of footsteps slowing and stopping, as well as car braking.*

9        SHERIFF: What's your name, son?

10       CONGER: Conger. I'm staying at the Appleton place.

11       SHERIFF: Not anymore you ain't. Let me see some ID.

*SFX of a wallet being handed over.*

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1        SHERIFF: You're the man I've been sent for. What'd you do to Bill Willet? Set off a bomb or something?

2        CONGER: A bomb? (*Laughs.*) No. My cigarette lighter had a leak, the fluid caught, boom. He ok?

3        SHERIFF: Well...he's madder than a bear gettin' an enema, but he'll be ok. Not so sure his dentist will agree, though.

4        CONGER: Dentist? Why?

5        SHERIFF: Must've been the surprise from your little lighter mishap. He spun and fell, banged his face on the dinner table. Knocked out one tooth and chipped another clear in half.

6        CONGER: His teeth...

7        SHERIFF: I'm no fan of the Willets myself, Mr. Conger, and even though Bill might be traveling the holy road, there's a troublesome streak to be found within that boy. Nonetheless, you're not welcomed back at the Appletons, and I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't take you in overnight.

8        CONGER: It wouldn't be the first night I've spent in a jail cell, Sheriff.

9        SHERIFF: Now that's a mighty curious thing to tell an officer of the law, but I'll pretend I didn't hear it. Let's just head back to the station, fix you up in our luxury suite, and bright n' early tomorrow, you can continue along to wherever you were getting to before landing in Cooper's Creek.

10       CONGER: I could do for a rest.

11       SHERIFF: Best place in town to do it for the price.

*Music vamp.*

### Scene 7

*SFX of a police car braking.*

12       SHERIFF: Well, Mr. Conger, this is where I leave you. I hope you enjoyed your little stay in Cooper's Creek last night.

13       CONGER: Your jail cell was the most comfortable I've slept in.

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1        SHERIFF: I'm glad to hear it! And the Appletons will be glad to hear that you've left town. Everyone will be glad all over, and that's a win in my book!

2        CONGER: Almost everyone's.

3        SHERIFF: This here is Hudson's Field. It also marks the town line for Cooper's Creek. Now you can travel along the shoulder here, but it's eventually gonna turn west to take you on to Denver. If you're up for it, it would be quickest to go through the field so you're not stuck out here walking all day.

*SFX of car door opening.*

4        CONGER: Thank you, Sheriff Duff.

*SFX of car door closing.*

5        SHERIFF: You seem like a good man, Conger, so I'm going to trust that you leave like I asked and not sit here and watch you do it. *(Beat.)* Vaya con dios, Mr. Conger.

*SFX of car driving off.*

*SFX of CONGER walking through grass.*

6        CONGER: There you are...my ticket out of here.

*SFX of a car approaching fast.*

7        CONGER: What...?

*SFX of car driving off the road, onto the grass and braking.*

*SFX of car door being thrown open.*

8        CONGER: Jesus Christ.

9        BILL: No, Bill Willet, but I'll take that as a compliment.

*SFX of passenger door opening.*

10       LORA: Bill Willet, this is far too much! Get back here this instant or I'm calling the Sheriff!

11       BILL: What in the world is that thing? Looks like some kinda...cage? Is that yours? You really are an animal, aren't you?

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1        CONGER: I don't want to hurt you, Bill, but I will if I have to.

2        BILL: Another special wardrobe trick? Will your shirtsleeve shoot a web at me? You one of those superheroes?

3        CONGER: Are you him? The Founder?

*SFX of BILL walking away, up ramp to cage.*

4        BILL: Why don't you show me around a bit!

5        CONGER: Stay out of there!

6        BILL: Look at all these fancy controls and things! I know what this is! A time machine!  
*(Laughs hysterically.)*

7        CONGER: I will only ask you nicely one more time.

8        BILL: Your first time wasn't very nice, though. And don't worry, I'm not going touch nothing. Except...what is that? A skull? A human skull? Why you got that?

9        CONGER: Get out!

*SFX of a fistfight.*

10       CONGER: (Spitting blood.) You knocked my tooth out!

11       BILL: Eye for an eye. Or maybe it should be, a tooth for a tooth. Hey, we look kinda like that skull up on your shelf now, don't we? Minus the bullet hole in the side.

*SFX of other cars driving up and braking, including the police car.*

*SFX of the SLEM-gun being cocked.*

12       LORA: Get out of there! Both of you!

13       ED DAVIES: Conger, for God's sake, what are you doing?!?

14       BILL: What the hell is that? A gun? You going to shoot me, Mr. Conger? How predictable of your kind.

15       CONGER: I don't want to!

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1 BILL: You hear that, everyone? He doesn't want to shoot me with his fancy gun!

2 SHERIFF: Conger! Willet!

3 CONGER: I understand now.

4 BILL: Understand what?

5 CONGER: Why I'm here. The purpose.

6 BILL: You...do?

7 CONGER: Yes, I see my path. What I must do to complete my mission here.

8 BILL: But...you're not....I am the one who...

9 CONGER: I am The Founder.

10 SHERIFF: Put your weapon down!

11 CONGER: I can't!

12 SHERIFF: Conger, I'm warning you! I'm not asking you again!

*SFX of CONGER continuing to walk.*

*SFX of shot being fired.*

13 CONGER: Aahh! My leg!

14 SHERIFF: Take that as my final warning!

15 CONGER: "Those who take lives will lose their own...."

16 LORA: What is he saying?

17 ED DAVIES: Is it from the Bible?

18 CONGER: "Those who kill, will die."

19 APPLETON: That's not from any Bible I know.

20 SHERIFF: Conger! Take that gun away from your head!



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1 CONGER: "But those who give their own life will live again!"

*SFX of gunshot.*

*SFX of body falling.*

*APPLETON screams.*

2 LORA: Oh my God! He...he....shot himself in the head!

3 ED DAVIES: Jesus, Conger, why?!?

4 SHERIFF: God dammit. You didn't have to do this, Conger.

5 BILL: He...didn't...want....to hurt anyone. *(Beat.)* Why?

*Music vamp.*

### Epilogue

*SFX of a hospital maternity ward.*

6 DOCTOR: There's the new mother! How are you feeling?

7 MRS. CONGER: Fine, a little tired....very sore....but nothing I can't handle.

8 MR. CONGER: How is the baby, Doctor?

9 DOCTOR: Very well! For being three weeks premature, he's remarkably strong. I can see where he gets it from!

10 MRS. CONGER: He will need that strength in this world. I just heard the most awful story on the news, about this...prophet, I guess...who preached non-violence but was executed by police anyway!

11 MR. CONGER: How can anyone be a good person in our society when this is what happens to people like this pacifist?

12 DOCTOR: All I can tell you is to love and protect your child as much as you can. As I know you will. Now, would you like to meet your son?

13 MRS. CONGER: Yes. Please let me meet my little Omar.

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*Music vamp.*

The End