



THE SHANDLER CHRONICLES

New Cthulhu fiction! Supernatural skullduggery runs amok in this continuing series of writings culled from the archives of occult investigator Phillip Shandler, as transcribed by Call of Cthulhu author Monte Cook.

SHANDLER
INVESTIGATIONS

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Dear Thomas,

April 21, 1930

I'm still in the hospital in Fairfax. I'm sorry I couldn't finish my tale in the last letter, but they keep me fairly sedated here and I don't have a lot of time to write.

I was telling you about my experiences at Hank Webber's farm. After Hank chased me down a country road, I crashed my truck into his barn—where he was harboring some inhuman beast. Hank crashed into the truck from behind. I barely got out in time before the whole barn went up in flames. (The back of my truck was filled with gasoline cans for that very purpose.)

The thing in the barn was gone. I think it was due to my exposing it to daylight and not the burst of fire from the crash. I guess I'll never know for sure. Hank went up in the blaze as well, and as far as I could tell, so did his vile little boy. It seemed that everything was going to be alright.

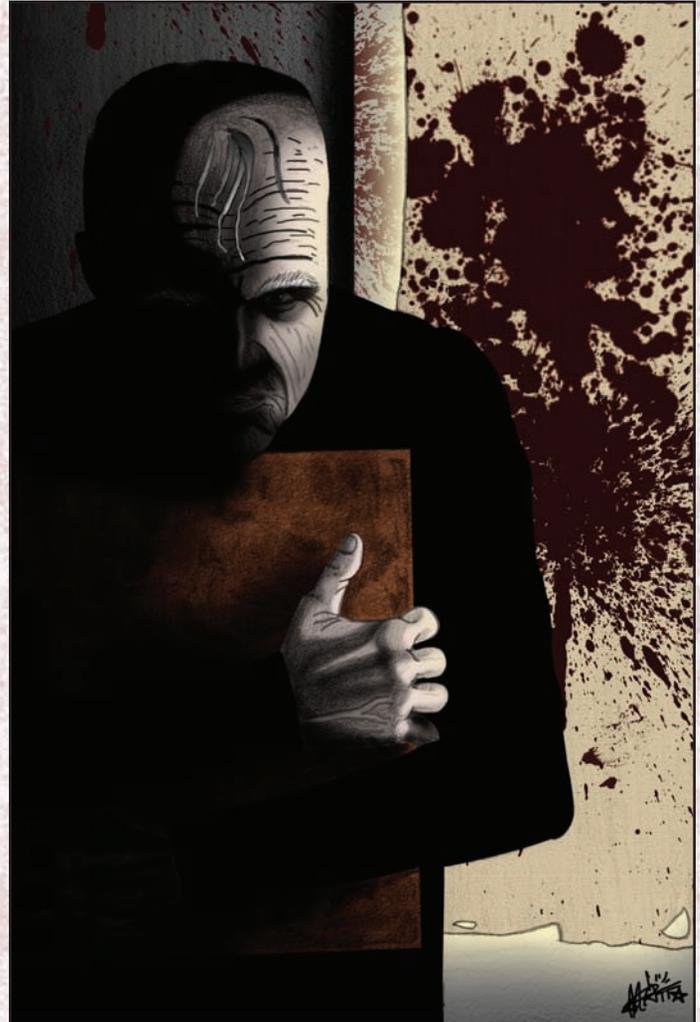
All I needed to do next was find your copy of the Pnakotic Manuscripts that Hank stole from me. I turned from the burning barn and stumbled toward the old farmhouse. The door was unlocked, and squeaked loudly on old hinges. All the shades were drawn, letting no light into the house. I almost choked on some foul odor that clung heavily in the air as I walked in. Old newspapers and magazines lay scattered everywhere, some covered in what must be years of filth. Since the book was stolen only a short time ago, I knew I wouldn't have to look for it under those—thank goodness. From the smell of things, I assumed that something was probably growing underneath them.

I carefully made my way around the piles of trash and old papers to get through what must be the living room. I saw a staircase up to the second floor and an open doorway into the kitchen. The smell seemed to get worse the closer I came to the kitchen, and I figured that Hank wouldn't keep a book in there, so I decided to go upstairs.

As I reached the bottom stair, however, I heard a noise. Floorboards creaking. Something was moving around above me.

Was there another member of this horrible Webber clan?

I wished for a flashlight. If anything the upstairs seemed darker than the main floor. I wished for a weapon. I had brought a shotgun in the truck, but that was certainly gone. Then, I remembered that the kid was running around outside with a shotgun as well. I climbed over a stack of bundled papers, some old shirts and other garbage, and leaned across an old chair to get at the nearest window. I pulled up the shade and looked out at the front yard through the filthy glass. I saw the burning barn and the crashed vehicles, and low and behold the boy's gun laying in the gravel.



I went back out and ran to the shotgun. Grasping it tightly in my hands, I looked around. I didn't see anything or anyone moving. Still, I had an odd sensation. I turned and glanced up at the second story of the house. One of the shades fluttered. Someone was watching me.

I checked to make sure the shotgun was loaded and walked back into the house with as much determination as I could muster. Once inside, I climbed the trash-covered stairs. I heard more noises from above, like someone rummaging.

At the top of the staircase, a short hallway connected four rooms. All four doors were closed. I leaned against the banister and listened for a clue as to where the other person was. I couldn't look for the book while there was someone else around. I didn't want to get jumped while I was distracted.

As I paused in the dim, dust-choked hall, I heard someone talking softly and slowly.

"All this time, must find it," the voice said. "All this time. Now is the time. Now." It sounded like a man—a very old man. "Can't let him get it. Not safe. No longer safe."

Perhaps Hank's father was up here, I mused. Shouldn't be too much trouble. And his talking let me know which room he was in; the front-most room, which I should have been able to identify when I was outside looking up. My mind wasn't entirely clear, however. The crash, and seeing that thing in the barn both affected me and not in a good way. I felt shaky and a little dazed as I walked down the clothes-strewn hallway to the door.

I gave it another listen.

"Yes, here it is," the man said with some glee. No one responded. He must have been talking to himself. "Here it is. Now I must find a new place, away from here."

I took a deep breath and flung open the door.

A man stood in a room filled almost to the ceiling with books. He was old and thin, with just a hint of grey hair on an otherwise bald head. His suit was black and looked more like a costume. It was very old fashioned. The man clasped a heavy book in his arms like a loved child. My hopes rose as I thought perhaps that was the book stolen from me. They were quickly dashed as I realized that it was a black, heavily worn leather-bound tome I'd never seen before.

"No!" He screamed. "Get away!"

I pointed the shotgun at him.

"Who are you?" I demanded.

He calmed down almost immediately. His face contorted into a slight smile, showing me only a small number of yellow teeth.

"You know who I am, Phillip," he said softly.

Suddenly, there was something eerily familiar about this man. I'd heard his voice before. Once, through the words of an innocent child on a train, and once in a mysterious phone call. This was Simon Carlisle, leader of the cult that had been wiped out here a hundred years ago. Simon Carlisle, whom I knew to be dead.

I felt my knees go weak as I saw the truth. I could sense that I was about to pass out entirely. Before I could let that happen, I pulled the trigger on the shotgun and the blast seemed to light up the whole room.

With unbelievable speed, the old man turned, so that the shotgun blast struck his side rather than his front. In some strange moment of clarity I realized that he was protecting the book.

Bits of the old man's body sprayed against the blinds over the windows, but he still stood. He not only remained standing, he laughed.

"Not good enough," he shook his head. "Not nearly enough."

I dropped to my knees in horror.

He clutched the book tighter. "All that is important is that you don't get hold of this," he said. "This isn't for your eyes. This is a holy book. This is where the master's secrets can be found."

The smell of burned flesh filled the room.

I gagged as I looked up at him, the hole torn in his side hanging open like grisly maw. He clearly had no need for the flesh he inhabited, and felt no pain from the wound. He glared down at me with contempt. My mind couldn't take this anymore.

Simon pulled the shade, still covered in blood and gore, away from the window and glanced out. "You've done a terrible thing, Phillip. Terrible. But I blame Mr. Webber for that more than you. Yes. He was a poor servant and got only what he deserved."

"Liar!" a voice coughed from back in the hallway. It was the Webber's fat little boy. His snarling face was blackened and his clothes were burned and torn. Most of his hair was burned away.

At that point, Thomas, I was sure that I was dead. Between the old man who should be dead and the young boy who had somehow escaped death, I was done for. But the boy wasn't paying any attention to me. His rage was focused on Simon.

"Go away, child," Simon said dismissively. But the boy roared incoherently and launched himself at Simon. There was a terrible bone-cracking noise as the two collided. Simon dropped the book as old bones shattered.

What a shotgun blast couldn't do, an overweight hellion could, I guess.

Still, Simon was not dead. The two of them rolled atop a pile of books, their motions causing the tomes to slip and crash onto the floor like water. Clearly broken and ruined, Simon reached up with shaking hands and grasped the boy's throat. The boy pounded on the old man's body, raising clouds of dust out of his ancient suit.

Simon's hands flashed with fire that burned green. The boy screamed and fell backwards in a cascade of books, onto the floor. The old man's gaunt head, which looked more like a skull now, turned toward where I still lay on the floor, next to the black book. He tried to speak, but his jaw was shattered and nothing coherent came out. His hand reached for me, and for the book, on the end of a shaking arm so broken that it seemed to have more than just one joint.

Then, without warning, the old, battered body just gave out on Simon. In the blink of an eye, he crumbled to dust—clothing and all.

I don't know what happened after that, Thomas. I was apparently found laying out on the old road. The authorities questioned me, of course, but I only told them the more believable parts. Hank Webber killed Sheriff Hicks and was killed himself in a barn fire. Apparently, surprisingly, I'm not under suspicion for any wrongdoing.

When they found me, though, I was apparently clutching the black book. It's right here next to me now. I'm sorry that it's not your book.

This one is called the Necronomicon.

Sincerely,

Phillip