



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.

*From the Desk of
Thomas Bode*

Dear Mr. Fister

July 7th, 1930

I found myself tonight in the home of a spiritual medium. Considering that I have always believed such individuals to be nothing more than fanciful in the best, charlatans in the worst, how I arrived in this situation requires some explanation.

(Your recent letter of support and encouragement was much needed and appreciated, as is news that everything is alright at home. Again, I am grateful to you for taking care of Miss Whiskers.) In the past few days I have searched this city far and near, and been in contact with the police multiple times. There is no sign of my friend, Phillip Shandler.

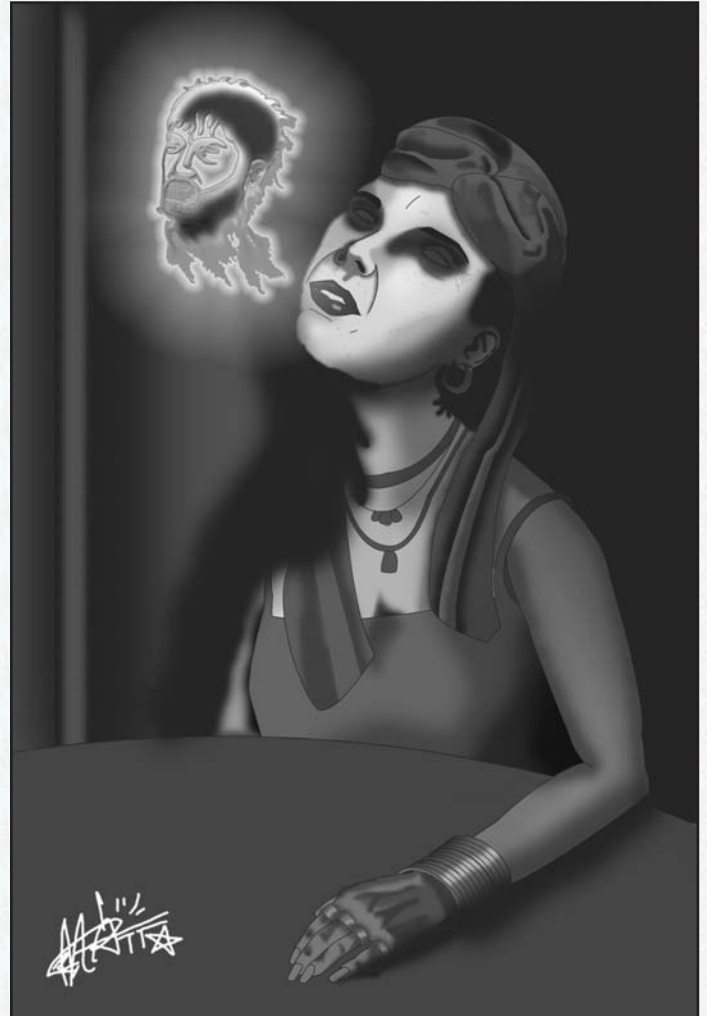
After learning of his mysterious disappearance from the home of Miss Jennifer Addison, and finding no mundane, straightforward solution, I have chosen to pursue more incredible possibilities and avenues of inquiry.

Phillip had once mentioned to me a woman who was an expert in spiritual matters. She worked as a medium out of her home but was also willing to provide consultation services in extraordinary matters.

The medium's name, almost certainly false, was Madam Zabim. This name, I am certain, is meant to be exotic, but it actually refers to nothing, of course. "Zabim" is from no language I have heard of. To say I was dubious is a fair understatement. Still, I telephoned and made an appointment.

In the intervening time, I found an interesting article in the library about "spiritual disappearances." This phenomenon is described as being a circumstance where a spiritual force or entity takes something, or in some cases, someone, in the real world away. The object or person is presumably taken to the spirit world. "Spirited away," as it were.

Madam Zabim's flat was the upper story of an older house, reached by a creaking outside staircase. Inside, the lights were very dim, almost completely dark. I smelled dust, a harsh perfume, and a cloying incense. Madam Zabim greeted me almost instantly. She spoke in what I have to assume was a fake accent, but at least it was consistent. Her long red gown brushed against the rug on the floor, and she wore a stupefying amount of jewelry. Most of it appeared to be charms and talismans of some kind, but I recognized none of them, particularly in the poor light. Her face was care-worn far beyond her



years and her hair appeared thin beneath a dark shawl she had draped over her head and shoulders.

She looked at me with suspicion. "You have come here looking for someone," she said. "No, for someone," she corrected herself.

I introduced myself and told her I was interested in finding out more about spiritual disappearances.

She led me through a curtain into a room heavy with draperies. In the middle of the floor, a small table was likewise heavily draped. It was only missing the prerequisite crystal ball.

She sat at the table and bid me to a chair opposite her.

"Who has disappeared?"

"No, I just came to ask a few questions," I said.

"Who has disappeared," she asked again.

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So I explained as briefly as I could, saying that Phillip Shandler, a friend of mine had suddenly disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

She nodded. "I know of this man. Haunted."

"Hmm, perhaps."

"Let us see if we can find him." She placed her hands on the table and closed her eyes.

I did not close my eyes, still extremely leery. I was also a bit annoyed that she did not seem willing to answer my questions, or even hear them.

Madam Zabim began to hum. Having read a bit about this kind of thing, I next expected the curtains to flutter and the table to rise. When it did, I had every intention of looking to find the woman's accomplice underneath the table or behind the curtains.

Nothing like that happened. Instead, Madam Zabim seemed to grow limp. At the same time, I felt a chill, as if a draft into the room had just lowered the temperature.

Madam Zabim's eyes opened, but they had rolled back into her head. I saw only white. She opened her mouth as if to speak, but no sound came out. Instead, a whitish substance came out of her mouth. The expulsion was like milk, or rather the vapor of milk, for it hovered in the air like a tiny cloud of steam. It did not billow like a gas but simply hung in the air like a stain about twelve inches across.

As you know, Mr. Fister, I am well-versed in occult studies, both from my degree at Arkham University and the work I have done since then. I have described a few of my experiences with Dr. Mann's machine and the Silver Moon Society, although I must admit there are things I felt inappropriate to mention at the time. You know that I am no stranger to the extraordinary. Nevertheless, I must stress now that I have felt no sensation like that which gripped me tonight when I saw that.

Books describe this substance as "ectoplasm." If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would have been sure that it was trickery or delusion. But then things grew even stranger.

The ectoplasm moved, like a wavering sheet. Before my eyes, the substance took on the likeness of my friend Phillip's face. Nothing I know of could have created such an illusion. It spoke a single word, which I could not hear but could understand by reading his lips. Also, I must tell you that it was a word, a name, that I was not surprised that he would say.

"Fiona."

He referred to Fiona Carlisle, Simon Carlisle's granddaughter and a woman that Phillip had met twice in his dreams.

The ectoplasmic image faded and the substance fell like a sticky, messy liquid or cream onto

the table. Madam Zabim appeared to be unconscious. I do not know if she even saw what I had seen.

I sat silently for quite a while, attempting to correlate and absorb all I experienced. As I sat, the ectoplasm quickly evaporated, leaving only a stain on the tablecloth.

Madam Zabim roused, and wiped her mouth with an ungainly manner. She cleared her throat. "Do you know," she asked, "what you must do now?" I nodded.

"Good. That will be twenty dollars."

Her request shook me out of my astonishment. Money? Suddenly, I was leery again. Had I just seen some kind of elaborate performance? I pushed my chair away from the table and stood up.

Had I been taken in?

She motioned me back through the curtain and I once again stood near the door.

I pulled my wallet from my jacket pocket and produced two ten dollar bills.

She took them, folding them quickly so that they disappeared in her hand, then looked at me and said, "you and I have mutual acquaintances."

I shook my head dumbly to try to show that I did not know what she meant.

"Zabim is a close approximation of my Yithian name," she whispered, and then bid me leave.

I should have knocked on the door, and tried to get back in. I should have asked her more about what that meant. But I did not. I am not sure why. Perhaps I was, once again, just too stunned.

You see, Mr. Fister, while I would rather not elaborate at this time, "Yithian," or as I prefer, the Great Race of Yith, are the almost certainly inhuman creatures that inspired Dr. Mann and I to build that machine months ago. We did not know that at the time. It came to light only later, when Phillip became involved and saved my life. I do not know if the reference should reassure me or terrify me. There are clearly so many things beyond the ken of man in his current state. We know neither the truth of the past and certainly not the future. Perhaps not even the present. I do not know how much of this sort of thing you understand or believe, Mr. Fister, but it seems to have some inkling of the truth to me.

Although it may seem insane, I know now how to find Phillip. I leave for Boston tomorrow morning.

Yours truly,

T. Bode