



# 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 11th, 1930

Oh, the wonders – and the horrors – I have seen! I am sure that my writing skills are not up to the task of describing it all adequately. I also do not yet know what you think of all of this. Do you think these tales of dreams and séances to be a humbug? Balderdash? I can tell you from first hand experience that they are not. I shall be forever haunted by what has transpired. Fiona returned, last night, as I slept. She came to me in a dream, like a vision in white and gold. She stood over me and bade me get up from my bed, and follow her. I did so wordlessly. The door to my room, when she opened it, did not open to the corridor as it should have. Just like when Fiona came the previous night, beyond the doorway lay steps going down into darkness. Phillip told me about these steps. He described how they led down into a cave with two men—a cave I now saw with my own eyes! The men were Nasht and Kaman-Thah, and the place they called the Cavern of Flame. Meeting them was both dream-like and yet as real as I feel writing this letter. The men were cold and dour, and Fiona ushered me past them with haste, seeming quite familiar with these odd surroundings and people. From the cave, we found another staircase of stone. Down this long flight of steps, I finally managed to speak. “Where are we going?” I asked. She answered without looking at me. “You’re looking for your friend Phillip, and that’s where he has been taken – taken by my great grandfather, Simon.” “Your great grandfather is still alive after all?” “Oh no, Thomas, not alive. Not as you mean, in any event.” I reeled at the revelation, and then came to an even worse conclusion. “Phillip – is he also...” “No,” she interrupted. “Phillip is alive, but unwell. He is trapped between dream and madness.” At the bottom of the staircase, strangely, we found ourselves in a woodland deeper and darker than any I had ever seen. Fiona led me through its tangled reaches effortlessly. Even as I thought to ask, she said, “I have been here for many months, from your perspective, Thomas. And years, from mine. I know these lands well. This is fortunate for you, for they are very dangerous to the naïve or the foolish. We do not have the time – Phillip does not have the time – for you to become



acquainted with the Dreamlands on your own.” The Dreamlands. Just like Phillip had described. Eventually we passed out of the woods and crossed a fertile, hilly expanse. In the distance, past a silver river, I caught sight of a wondrous city of towers and minarets, but like a whisper only half-heard, it quickly disappeared. We walked for hours with great speed, pausing only for short rests. The ground was soft and free from rugged obstacles, and the air was warm and fresh. I found it surprisingly easy to keep up the brisk pace that Fiona maintained. Finally, after how long a time I could not guess, we saw a dark tower on the horizon. It rose up from the surrounding hills like a dagger that had been plunged into beautiful flesh. “Some people call that the Tower of Nyarlathotep,” Fiona said. “It is the dwelling place of those that serve him.” Once we reached

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the tower itself, I saw to my horror that it seemed that the walls of the structure writhed and squirmed. Only then did I realize that dozens of figures, not all of them completely human, hung from the walls by chains and hooks. Their movements betrayed their agony. I gasped and recoiled. They cried out to me, imploring me with their eyes. Dried blood and gore, a testament of pain, coated the tower around each figure. Fiona looked at me with sadness. "They are beyond our help. We must find Phillip." We entered the tower through a gaping doorway into a chamber as black and cold as midnight. (It is difficult, Mr. Fister, to describe my time in this place without using colorful similes. That is just the kind of place the Dreamlands are.) Things crawled in the darkness, beyond my sight, but I could hear them. God help me, I could feel them. They seeped down the interior walls and scuttled like spiders and writhed like worms. Like the chamber in which they dwelled, they were nothing but darkness and cold. I could no longer see Fiona. It seemed that I had spiraled down into nightmare. I could not move, nor even scream. Suddenly, a light flared. The squirming things recoiled from it. Fiona stood a few steps from me with a torch. She did not let me ask where she got it, instead leading me to yet another staircase. This one, however, led upward. I know it all sounds like a tale from the Brothers Grimm, but it's all true. I followed her up the winding stairs, which took us into yet another stone-floored chamber. The light from Fiona's torch flicked across something massive and twisted—a tall sculpture surrounded by three altars covered in black cloth. The statue at the center of this gruesome temple was a misshapen man-like figure, with loose flesh hanging from its bones, at least twenty feet tall. The thing had no head, but instead a terrible tendril, long and winding, rose up from where its neck should be. Again I recoiled. Even Fiona, who had shown nothing but bravery until now, cringed at its sight. "You must awaken him, Thomas. I don't think he will respond to anyone but you." I did not understand what she meant until I saw him. My friend Phillip Shandler lay chained to the base of the monstrous statue. I called his name, but he did not respond. I moved closer. Suddenly, the flesh of the statue was alive. Like the outside of the tower, it squirmed with the motion of smaller things. Unlike the victims I had seen, these things were nothing but skeletons, held together by darkness and tiny bits of flesh and tissue not yet rotted off of them. From the folds of the statue's flesh they reached toward me. Even as I stood over Phillip, between the massive legs of the thing above me, skeletal hands grasped at me. I called out to my friend again, but he did not stir. I saw that the chains that

held him were instead bony hands and arms dangling from the statue. Phillip was deathly pale and covered with bruises and blood. I was sure that we were too late. Still, I struggled with the grasping hands to try to get to him. I turned to look to Fiona for aid, but then I saw a terrible sight. An ancient man, withered with the grip of the grave, snatched her from behind, holding her fast. She cried in surprise. The man wore the dark coat and hat of a clergyman from days long past. This must be Simon Carlisle, shepherd of the Fellowship of the Risen God, master of the Witch Cult, high priest of Nyarlathotep! "Finally, child," he spoke with a voice like gravestone gravel, "you have come to find your inevitable destiny." Fiona did not reply to her undead ancestor, but instead implored me to reach Phillip.

I had to choose. No man should ever be faced with such a choice.

With a cry of rage and frustration, I tore away from the hands and lunged toward Phillip. Even as I heard the chilling laughter of a victorious fiend, I shook my friend with violence. "Wake up, damn you!"

The hands grabbed at me, pulling me back. I held tightly onto Phillip's shoulders and shook him with all my might. "Phillip, it's me, Thomas!"

Phillip's eyes fluttered open. "Thomas?"

Without warning, a force struck me like a hard slap. The grasping hands were gone. The cold, cloying darkness receded. I was no longer in that temple of horrors, but in my hotel room, on the floor, tangled in my bedclothes. Before I was even able to question if it had been real or merely dream, to my wonder and astonishment, I saw that Phillip lay nearby on the floor. Just as he had in the Dreamlands, he bore battered and bruised flesh that hung on his thin frame with a terrible gauntness.

But he was alive. I had found him.

The price, however, seemed more than I could bare.

Despairing, I donned my coat and took my barely conscious friend to the hospital. I now wait at his bedside, writing this letter to you.

I hardly knew Fiona, but I witnessed what she did to help me and to save Phillip.

My mission here, Mr. Fister, was a success. But what a terrible price I have paid for my friend's life. How shall I ever forget the sight of Simon Carlisle dragging her back into the darkness?

I do not know that I ever shall.

Yours truly,

*T. Bode*