



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

Phillip Shandler
188 Gibson Lane
Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Thomas,

February 25, 1931

Even though I am a native New Englander myself, I don't think I ever realized how far north our great country goes. Chillacost, Maine is farther north than many Canadian cities like Toronto or Montreal. It's so very cold up here. I think it's the wind.

I hope you are well. The last few days up here, spent in solitude, I've been thinking about my experiences last year and how much I owe you for all your help. You're a good friend, Thomas.

While the weather was good, I went back into the woods in my search for Dr. Michael Borchert, the missing historian. First I went back to his cabin in the woods. It was harder to reach than I thought it would be. The drifting snow had closed in around it like a mother's protective arms.

My first foray into the woods was a disaster. It became quickly clear that I wouldn't be able to reach it by car. After getting stuck in two different snowbanks blown up onto the road, I pulled off to the side and got out to make my way on foot.

Have you ever had occasion to use snowshoes, Thomas? I had not, myself. So I did not bother to look into them, despite the suggestions of Mrs. Borchert the day previous. All I got for my troubles was a wet, freezing day of little progress. The snow is deep and yielding. I had to turn back a number of times to try a different path. Eventually, I gave up and returned to my auto and back into town.

Yesterday, though, I found a man that would allow me to use a pair of snowshoes for the day. With some advice and practice, I got the hang of them. I left the car where it was and used only the shoes. They made a great deal of difference, but each step with the heavy things is slow and cumbersome. I found using them to be a great effort.

Through perseverance, though, I reached the site of Borchert's cabin. It took me nearly 15 minutes to dig the door free of the snow that the wind had piled up against the side of the cabin so I could get inside.

Within the cabin, I made some disturbing discoveries. After shaking the snow from my clothes and deciding not to try to start a fire in the fireplace to warm myself (I felt no draw from the chimney and worried that it wasn't clear), I looked around again. As I told you in previous correspondence, both the authorities, which is to say, the sheriff, and I had already been up here. I wanted another look at Borchert's

notes, and I am glad I did. This time around, besides looking through the notebooks on his desk, I also noted that he had two trunks, each loaded with a great many rocks with faded inscriptions, some very old wooden figurines, and some strange fetishes I could not identify. Borchert had tagged a few of the rocks, but most were just piled in the trunks.

I looked through some of it, and quickly realized that the sheriff never had, either. He must have just written it all off as part of the doctor's work, and I suppose I can't blame him. If I did not already have some interest in Borchert's studies, I may have as well. Borchert was looking into an old religion from Colonial times which he referred to in his notes as the Black Goat Cult. In my second foray through his writings, I found that my suspicions had been correct. This cult's fertility goddess was actually the entity I'd read about in the Necronomicon known as Shub-Niggurath. Apparently, the idea is that she-it-is continually spawning and producing children, although I suspect by "children" they really mean some horrible inhuman abominations. This ancient being supposedly is responsible, inadvertently, for life in our world, according to the Necronomicon. And the cult doesn't counter that blasphemy—instead they simply contended that the Black Goat intentionally created all life and thus she was deserving of their praise and adoration. According to Borchert's notes, anyway.

Borchert had great difficulty collecting the information he had obtained, and was forced to use a variety of sources. He indicated in his notes, for example, that the Black Goat cult gained their information about the goddess from the local Indians. However, Borchert found that none of the Indians he spoke with today will talk about the Black Goat. They say that the people the cultists learned from were just a small tribe, referring to them as outcasts and evil, and contend that they have also long since died out.

Obviously, there were a lot of dead ends in his research, but the rocks and things he'd found indicated that he knew where the religion had held its rites and services, deep in the woods. This discovery, apparently, was Borchert's alone. I suspected that he might be up there now, and so I kept my eye out for its location as I went through the notebooks again.

While I never found what I was hoping for, a map, I did find a description of the place, with some suggestions of how to get there. This time

I put the notebooks in the knapsack I had brought with me. I did not want to return to the cabin again if I didn't have to. I was sure that Borchert, if he was alive, would not have minded.

Setting out from the cabin, I saw that I would not make it back to town until well after dark. Still, I had no intention of spending the night here. I tried to make haste, but with snowshoes, that is a tall order. Luckily, I had my own tracks to follow back, so I knew I wouldn't get lost.

About a half mile away from the cabin, I saw that there were other tracks running alongside mine. They hadn't been there earlier that day, so I could only draw the conclusion that they were following mine. Could it have been Borchert? I looked around of course, but it was already twilight and I saw nothing. It was only after I started walking again that I realized that the tracks were not snowshoe tracks. I looked at them again, and began to doubt that they were made by a human at all. I have no idea what kind of animal would make such lumbering, heavy steps. I could only think it was perhaps a bear. I made haste back to town.

Once safe and warm I enjoyed a hot meal and went to bed. Today, if the weather looks good, I'll set off for the site described in Borchert's notes.

Sincerely,

Phillip

Dear Thomas,

February 26, 1931

Soon after I mailed my last letter, it began to snow. Far too inhospitable to go out into the woods, particularly since I'm not sure where I'm going, exactly.

So I decided to just stay in and read over Borchert's notes in greater detail. However, about three this afternoon I heard a commotion outside my boarding house room window. I went down to check on the situation, and saw that, in the wind and snow, a number of people were huddling around what appeared to be another person in the snow. As I arrived, still donning my coat, I saw two men attempting to pick the person up and drag him inside. When they grabbed hold, they quickly recoiled, both at the same time. The man—I'm fairly certain it was a man—was covered in some kind of thin yellow substance, almost like mucus. It appeared to be half frozen on his body,



which was entirely bare under an unbuttoned coat.

"What's going on? Who is this?" I asked them.

"He just stumbled into town, out of the woods," one person answered.

"It's Eli Martin. He lives way north of town. But somethin' awful's happened to him," another said.

I bent down for a closer look. The man's body was not only covered in the syrupy substance, but his skin bore strange marks that looked to me like handprints, but not like how a handprint would look on flesh, but how they would look on soft clay. It didn't look so much like someone had slapped him as tried to sculpt him. His limbs were twisted at odd angles and I wondered how he had walked here from anywhere. He seemed wracked with pain, and no wonder.

From where I crouched, despite the talking and shouting of those around me and wind blowing in our ears, I could hear him say one thing:

"Black Goat."

Then he lost consciousness. Frostbite, exposure, exhaustion, no doubt. Maybe more. No, almost certainly more. I yelled at the others until someone told me where the town doctor lived and more still until someone else gathered up the courage to help me carry him there.

The doctor, a younger man named David Brown, was astonished at what we brought him, but quickly ushered us out to let him work. I just left his office/home and returned to the boarding house.

I don't have to tell you that this is all coming together in a very terrible way, do I?

I am more than a little frightened. I feel very far from home.

Sincerely,

Phillip