



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

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Dear Thomas,

December 30, 1938

As I said in my last letter, I am currently in a Czechoslovakian region called Carpathian Ruthenia, or Carpathian Rus. My companions and I are within a little farmhouse outside the city of Mukachevo. The ancient Chanov Castle lies not far away, looking down upon us from the mountains like a raptor eyeing a prospective meal.

Once we escaped Danzig, we rode south in two trucks provided by Schmitt, our local contact. The British intelligence men, Fleming, Fitzsimmons, Jones, and the others, were all quiet and tense. Crowley, of course, was silent as he had been since his strange communion with Aiwass. But he seemed utterly relaxed.

I wanted to ask how the Nazis in Danzig knew that we were there. I wanted to ask how Crowley knew all that information about the police officer. But I, too, kept my silence as we drove through the snow and wind and ice.

On the second day of the journey, Crowley began speaking to me. His words flowed like water from a suddenly opened tap. Unfortunately, I couldn't understand one of them. At first I thought it might be Latin, but then I thought better of that. Some of the words seemed strange passing across human lips. I thought them more like animal noises or simply sounds I can't quite identify.

"Aleister," I said, putting up my hand. "I don't understand. What are you saying?"

He simply continued. His face showed little emotion, although there was an intensity in his eyes that held me in a tight grasp for a time.

The others with us appeared as baffled as I, but clearly feared Crowley enough that they said and did nothing. Their gazes fell to the floor of the back of the truck in which we rode, or out the open back. Wind tore at the canvas tarp above us but Crowley's unintelligible diatribe drowned it out.

Without warning, his speech turned fevered. He leapt at me with a ferocity I would not have expected from a man of his age and bulk. He crashed into me and his momentum took us both out of the back of the vehicle. The next thing I knew, we were sprawled in a jumbled heap in the snow, the jolt of our impact ringing through my head.

I tried to lift myself up, but Crowley was faster. With astonishing speed, he was on his feet and lifting me by my shoulders. I saw past him that the truck had come to a stop. I think I heard shouts from the men inside. Those that saw Crowley attack me must have bid the driver to slam on the brakes.

Crowley continued to babble at me. His face showed an animal-like intensity. With a thrust at his chest, I tried to break free. He held fast.

"You've gone insane, man!" I shouted into the freezing air. I knocked his hands from my shoulders and backed away. The men in the truck were still shouting.

I wondered why they weren't getting out of the truck to see what had become of us.

Crowley lunged at me again, but I avoided him. He said just one thing to me, and I understood it. "Adriana."

Then Crowley stood in the snow and pointed back at the truck with a thick arm.



I looked, and saw the men we were with getting out, finally. But something was wrong. Horribly wrong. They tumbled out of the back and crumpled onto the ground. One man - Jones? - draped over the back edge of the truck and lay motionless.

Then I saw the blood.

Spattered across the white of the new snow, dark blood was everywhere. I ran to the truck.

Ours had been the rearmost of the two vehicles. At that point, the other truck had stopped as well. Those inside it, including Fleming and Fitzsimmons, got out to investigate and reached the truck Crowley and I had been in at about the same time as I did.

"What happened?" Fleming demanded.

We stood over all five men that had been in the truck with Crowley and I. All were clearly dead, their bloody bodies twisted and bent in horrific ways.

I looked back at Crowley, who stood staring silently into the snow.

We could find no cause for this event. No evidence of a weapon, a bomb, or a conventional attack of any kind. Fleming had at first thought it was a bomb, but it seemed more like the poor souls had each exploded from the inside. Fitzsimmons suggested poison gas, but if that was the case there was no sign of it by the time we had reached the vehicle. All the men in the truck—including the driver—we had ridden in were dead. Crowley had pushed me out just before it occurred, but now said nothing.

Fleming insisted we couldn't linger on the road too long. We buried the men in the snow and left the gore-filled truck in the woods.

The rest of the journey was uneventful, but filled with an even more somber silence than before.

I, for one, believed that Adriana knew we were coming, and was using some overt supernatural means to stop us at every turn. If true, then Crowley is our only hope for protection as we proceed.

I don't know which worries me more.
Sincerely,

Phillip