



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,

January 21, 1939

I think the last time I wrote, we were trapped in the ice, thanks to what I now call the ice howler, the thing which killed Fitzsimmons. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We were in our cabin in the Carpathian Mountains, waiting for the blizzard to pass so that we could attempt to regain the stolen Star of Unseen Stars, in the possession of an inhuman sorceress named Adriana. We had to dig our way out, as the building was entirely buried in snow. But when we tried to leave, a creature attacked us. Fitzsimmons shot it, and we retreated inside.

As soon as we tried the door again, however, it would not budge. We tore it apart only to discover that ice had suddenly appeared like a wall, glistening and smooth. It sealed us in as surely as a wall made of bricks.

We all stared at it, exhausted from an already arduous day. I nursed the wound where the creature outside had struck me. I would surely have a bruised face, but it had drawn little blood. I was thankful for that. I'd be fine. Fitzsimmons, however, began to look anemic. At first I thought it was exhaustion or terror, but while everyone tried to chip through the ice, he stepped back and crouched on the floor. When hammering at the ice proved fruitless, all the men began to argue about what to do next. Fitzsimmons remained quiet, and took on an even worse demeanor than the rest of us.

"What's wrong" I asked him.

He stared at me with wide eyes and finally whispered. "So cold."

I grabbed his shoulder and quickly pulled it back. I'd never felt a man so cold. Not a living man, in any event. It was only then that I saw that he still held his firearm. Far more surprising, however, was that the pistol was coated in frost.

"Good god, man. Are you all right? Let go of that gun."

He only stared.

I pulled off my coat and wrapped my hand in one of the sleeves. Protected, I grabbed the pistol. Fitzsimmons didn't resist, exactly, but he didn't let go of the pistol, either. I asked him to release it again, and he said nothing. I pulled. The weapon came free from his hand, but it took with it a surprising amount of the man's flesh.

His mouth gaped, but he made no sound. I gave a yell and the others came over to us. I dropped the pistol and saw that the bloody flesh on it, as well as on his torn hand, did not bleed. Instead, the blood fell away in sticky clumps. It was mostly frozen.

At that point, Fitzsimmons collapsed backward with a choked sigh and a crash. One of the men used a finger to check for a pulse and drew it back as quickly as I had.

"He's like ice!"

Fleming stood over Fitzsimmons and looked down into the man's staring eyes. "He's dead."

"But how?" I asked.

Fleming just shook his head.

The men discussed this horrific turn of events. I did my best to examine his corpse without defiling it overmuch. It became clear - the body was frozen as surely as if he'd been out in the elements unprotected for months, or held in a freezer for a similar amount of time. One other detail was obvious. The cold emanated from the pistol, and the hand which had held it. And then it dawned on me. Not only held it, but fired it. At the creature.



Perhaps there was some kind of sorcery at work here. Perhaps anyone that attacked or inflicted harm upon the ice howler was afflicted with this kind of freezing doom. A curse of sorts.

It was Fleming, of course, who found the way out. He had the men bust out one of the frost-covered windows, and then we began - again - to tunnel up through the snow that buried the house. The already exhausted men took hours to accomplish the task, and the tunnel was only wide enough to permit a man to crawl on his belly, but we broke through to the surface eventually. And by that time, the sun had risen. The wind still blew, but no new snow fell. The sky was clear but cold.

We were out. The ice howler was not there standing vigil, as we had feared, although the men found partially buried tracks all around the cabin, as well as bits of a frozen black substance that I speculated was the beast's blood. Fitzsimmons had injured the thing. Perhaps even drove it off. But doing so cost the man his life.

Tired beyond my capacity to describe fully, we shambled our way across - and in many cases through - the new fallen snow. We walked for hours in dour silence, driven by only a need to survive. Eventually we all but collapsed into the snow-bound town of Mukachevo where we found shelter, warmth, and food among charitable residents. One of our men had severe frostbite, and another seems ill from the exertion, but we're alive.

We still have to get to Chanov Castle, however, and find Adriana. And get the stone. Morale is low, but it's been replaced with a feeling of vengeance. We've lost many good men on this mission, and the best of them was Fitzsimmons. The ice howler is likely still out there, but I for one don't care. I don't blame it, I blame it's mistress. I want Adriana to pay for what she had done.

And I know that Aleister Crowley is probably the only man alive who can help me make that happen.

Sincerely,

Phillip