



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 29, 1939

I don't know how much time I have to write. I hope that this is not the end.

Chanov Castle squats amid the icy Carpathians like a brooding toad. As we approached under cover of the frozen night, we could see lights of yellow and violet flickering from within its black walls.

We knew that inside, the inhuman creature that called itself Adriana waited, the stolen Star of Unseen Stars in her possession. We knew we had to get it back. What we didn't know was, she was getting ready to leave.

Some of Fleming's men had learned that Adriana had kidnapped local children and placed strange collars on their necks that would allow her to slay them at a moment's notice. Fortunately, we had Aliester Crowley on our side - or at least, the physical form of the man. For I now knew that it was merely a vessel for the spirit being Aiwass. We had spent a week or so in the nearby town of Mukachevo, recovering from our ordeal in the storm, and Crowley/Aiwass had spent that time making something.

I don't know where he obtained the materials, Thomas, but when he was done he gave me an ungainly object of wood, glass, and bits of twisted iron the size of a man's boot. Bit jutted out from a central core at odd angles so that it was difficult to determine where I was meant to hold onto it. As soon as he handed it to me, however, I could feel it pulse as though it had a heartbeat of its own, yet it made no sound and had no apparent moving parts.

"What is this?" I asked him.

"Its name is impossible for you," he told me slowly. "It absorbs vril."

I must admit, it took me a while to understand the implications of that statement. But eventually I realized that it would make our entry into the castle possible. With that, Fleming and I made our plans.

The castle was old, but not a ruin. When we reached the massive wood and iron doors that lead into the keep, they were as stout and sturdy as they would have been when the castle was built. The six of us stood in the cold night air outside the doors, but the stress of the situation kept me warm. We had made it to the door, and there was no sign that we'd been spotted. Our dark clothing and blacked faces allowed us to move through the night-this was the kind of thing that Fleming and the others had trained for-and we moved quickly and with stealth at least in part because we had left Crowley behind. His knowledge was invaluable, but his body was old and frail. And I strongly suspected that Aiwass pushed that physical form too much. I feared for the man when the spirit left him. Assuming it would.

The Brits worked on the door with tools as quietly as possible while I kept watch. I saw nothing.

The door opened quickly and we went into the dim interior. I expected to see child hostages and so held the vril absorber forth as I entered, but we were alone in the massive entry hall.

Fleming sent two men down side passages and the rest of us ascended a grand staircase toward a lighted archway. Without waiting for the other two, we proceeded down this corridor illuminated by flickering torches.

Two children stood at the end of the hallway. Each wore rags and looked terrified and mistreated. But they stood silently, their hands on brass collars strapped about their necks. The others stopped, but I raced forward. I didn't know how close I had to be.



Beyond the children I saw a huge, round chamber with a high ceiling. The walls were painted with symbols I did not understand. At its heart, a fiery glow pulsed with a life of its own, like a bonfire of violet light that consumed nothing. It was the size of a man.

Or a door.

Adriana stood next to it, the Star of Unseen Stars in her hands, pulsing in time with the doorway of light. Her long black hair undulated as if she were underwater.

"Stay back!" She cried and gestured toward the children. "Stay back or they die!"

I stood between the children and held up Crowley's device. The footfalls of my approaching allies echoed in the hall behind me. Adriana looked at it, and scowled. I took a single step forward. Nothing happened to the children.

It had been months since I had seen my precious stone. Seeing it then was like seeing a long lost love. I wanted to run to it. Grasp it. But I knew I had to stay near the children to block Adriana's Vril-Ya energies. It blocked her control over the collars. And hopefully any other hideous effects she might try to launch against us.

Fleming did not wait to talk. Bursts of deafening sound behind me told me that he and the others immediately opened fire when they saw Adriana. Bullets tore at the air around me, and over the children's heads. I ducked to the floor and pulled them down with me.

When I looked up, Adriana was gone.

Fleming shouted. "She disappeared into that light!"

"It's a doorway," I replied.

"A doorway to where?"

I didn't know, and so said nothing.

There was little debate. We all knew we had to follow her, despite how dangerous it might be. We waited for the others to catch up, so that all six of us could go through. I have hastily penned this and left it in the castle so that if we do not return, it might be found and somehow get sent to you. That seems unlikely, I know, but I have no other recourse.

If this is the end, let me tell you that you have been a good friend, Thomas. I hope that I will see you again.

Sincerely,

Phillip