



# 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

February 19, 1931

It's been some time since I've written. I hope you are well. It took me many weeks after I was released from the hospital to get back into the routine of my normal life. Unfortunately, once I was ready, I discovered that my normal life had long since passed me by. I had grown estranged from my friends and contacts, and my private investigations business had completely dried up. A stint in a mental hospital does not help an investigator's reputation. With months without work, bills were stacking up. I could not even get a job tailing an unfaithful husband. It looked like I would have to get work in some other field. A frightening prospect because, as you know, I don't have any skills or training for much else. Before I looked elsewhere, though, I decided to take a shot at being proactive. If the cases wouldn't come to me, I'd go looking for them. (I know, you are probably thinking that you had heard me criticize private investigators who worked this way. Desperate times call for desperate measures, my friend.) So, I began combing through the papers looking for a lead. It's not like the old days, though, Thomas. My nose for a case just doesn't seem to be what it used to be. I wasn't finding anything. Instead, my attention kept being drawn to stories that might—even in some small way—relate back to my experiences last year. Fortune, however, smiled upon me, as just such a story turned into a case. I suppose it is wrong to take heart in others' misfortunes, but I really need the work. You see, I found a newspaper article about a historian who was studying a small, obscure cult from about a hundred and fifty years ago in northern Maine. This cult worshipped a pagan fertility goddess known as the Black Goat. Now this, I must tell you, is related to a strange reference in the Necronomicon, regarding one of the Old Ones known as Shub-Niggurath, or "the black goat of the woods with a thousand young." I suspect that the suggestion that this entity is a "fertility goddess" is a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation... but I digress. Obviously, perhaps unhealthily, the newspaper story intrigued me, so I did some research on the historian, Dr. Michael Borchert. It turns out that Dr. Borchert is missing. He disappeared about two weeks ago in the Aroostook area of northern Maine, a remote region near the Canadian border. This is a deep, wooded land quite cold and snow-covered, apparently. I contacted his family and offered my services. I told them that

I was an investigator and had some background in Dr. Borchert's field as well, which is true at least on some level. In any event, it turns out that Borchert's wife Margaret and his sister Clarisse have both been trying to get someone to help them but no one would come up there. The police, they told me on the telephone, had already given up, assuming that the professor had been lost in a snowstorm. Mrs. Borchert offered me a very generous payment. I am getting on the train in just a few hours for Bangor, and then I'll be hiring a car to get north from there. Wish me luck!

Sincerely,

*Phillip*

Dear Thomas

February 22, 1931

I'm writing to you from Chillacost, Maine. I am as far north as I believe I ever have been. It's difficult, in fact, to imagine that the continent keeps going much farther north than this, even though I know it does. The woods here are deep, dark, and endless. The snow is as well. I wasted no time in working on the case to find Dr. Borchert. I spoke with his wife and sister, both here in Chillacost. They were able to provide me with a few basic details — the professor was on sabbatical from a teaching position at the university and has been quite obsessed with his research into little-known groups of pioneers and settlers in New England. Mrs. Borchert told me that when she last saw her husband, he had been on his way to the family cabin outside of town, where he did much of his research work in the quiet. The authorities have searched the cabin already, but I decided to go up there myself. My automobile runs well and it has not snowed for a few days so I had little trouble reaching it. While it obviously had been vacant for some time, I found a few notebooks the professor kept, and some old record books from the days of the early settlers he had obviously been reading. Dr. Borchert had apparently found a site where the Black Goat cult had conducted ceremonies, deep in the northern woods. He wrote of strange, moss-blackened stones scratched with "disturbing and unkind symbols." Mostly, he wrote about how the few references to the cult found in local histories mentioned their ability to "give life" granted them by their goddess. Borchert

believed that the symbols on the rocks he found suggested that the cultists used the power of the Black Goat to shape life, not simply produce it. If my memory of the Necronomicon serves, I think he may have been on to something. Still, nothing that I found suggested where he might have gone. I could see no evidence that he had been forcibly taken from the cabin, and began to agree with the assessment of the authorities. I suspected that he left the cabin to go to the cult site in the woods and fell foul to inclement weather or some accident. I returned to town. Chillacost is a very small town. I found lodging in a boarding house and took my dinner in the only pub in town. It was there that I learned that over the last few months, others had disappeared from the area. This piqued my interest and I inquired with the locals. The one commonality among all the disappearances seemed to be that the victims, five in all, not counting Borchert, had disappeared in or near the woods. One old woman, who had the look (and smell) of someone who spent far too much time in the pub, said that she had heard legends all her life of giant trees in the woods that moved like beasts of their own accord and took lone travelers. I thanked her for her time but paid her little heed, of course. I have seen many disturbing things in the last year or so, but that does not mean I am going to believe in silly stories about murderous trees. Today the wind really picked up, creating a serious ground blizzard in open areas. The woods shook with the wind, but in the thickest parts the trees provided a nice shelter. When it stops blowing so badly, I am going to go back to Borchert's cabin and try to ascertain the location of the religious site he found. I suspect I shall have to go from there on foot, so I want to make sure I do so in only friendly weather.

Sincerely,

*Phillip*

Dear Thomas

February 23, 1931

I am about to leave for the cabin, and hopefully Borchert's site in the woods. Last night, watching the trees sway in the terrible wind, their branches clawing at the air around them, I



almost began to believe what the old woman in the pub said (and continues to say, let me tell you). It is difficult to remain here long, in the bitter cold and isolation, and not begin to feel a palpable menace in the woods. It is as though the forest has an intelligence within it, but one that, no matter how deep within you travel, you would never find—it lies always deeper into the woods, no matter where you stand. And on nights like last night, that intelligence seems only dire. Today, however, the winds are calmed and the sun shines in the winter-white sky. Any aura of menace is gone, like the night's fancy it was. I'll write again to tell you if I find anything. Call it intuition, but I believe that somehow Borchert is still alive, and even if he isn't, I want to produce some results for his kind (and generous) wife and sister. They deserve to get some answers without having to wait for the Spring thaw. Again, I bid you wish me luck, Thomas. Please write soon.

Sincerely,

*Phillip*