



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,

March 2, 1931

My revolver is still in my left hand. I'm keeping the lights low in the room here at the boarding house. I have got to get out of these woods, but there's no way out in this storm. We're all in terrible danger.

Just a few days ago, after the horribly injured man stumbled into town from the woods, I did some investigating. The man, Eli Martin, lived a number of miles north of Chillacost. Apparently, the old man was a hermit of sorts. Kept to himself up in the woods. Only came to town for supplies. You know the type. Apparently, up here in the Maine woods, there are plenty of woodsmen like him.

When Eli would come to town, he'd occasionally tell some strange stories about odd animals, old Indian tribes and the like, but no one really paid much attention. No one except an old woman named Josephine Webster. I'd already met Jo in the local tavern, where she clearly spent most of her time.

I was able to find Jo that night. The whole town, it seemed, was in the pub talking about Eli. Jo was telling everyone some of the tales Eli shared with her about the woods. Stories involving trees that watched people – and could move.

"Walking trees do not explain what happened to him, though," I said to her.

"May not," she replied. "But sure as you're standin' there he told me himself 'bout some strange Indians deep in the wood who could turn a man inside-out and leave 'em livin'.

"Indians?"

"Yeah..." she said, nose wrinkling, "er some-thin' like that."

I talked with some of the other patrons in the tavern and they confirmed my suspicions that people around there attributed a lot of bad things to some Indians deep in the woods, but no one had ever seen them. Generations - old prejudice, more than fact, it seemed.

Although someone had done something to Eli. Of that there could be no doubt.

The next day, Eli Martin died.

Dr. Brown, the town doctor, could not account for his wounds. He said that, inside and out, it looked like Eli had been twisted. Pulled like taffy, he said, wide-eyed with horror. I left Brown's home, determined to find out what was going on. I was convinced that what happened to

Eli was linked to Dr. Borchert, the missing historian I'd come to find. The old cult that Borchert was studying was devoted to a thing called Shub-Niggurath and they claimed to have the ability to shape flesh. From what I saw of Eli and what the Doctor said, even a detective as thick-skulled as I can be could see that there was some link.

The Black Goat cult, as they were known, wasn't a thing out of history, as Borchert thought. It still operated, and probably was responsible for the historian's disappearance. If Borchert was alive, they almost certainly had him.

The snow let up the next day and the sun was shining, so I decided to head up into the woods. I'd had a site described in Borchert's notes where the cult had once conducted some kind of rites. I decided to make for that. I had learned the use of snowshoes already, and I made sure I brought my pistol and plenty of ammunition. No one was going to do to me what they had done to poor Eli Martin.

The trek was slow and arduous. Too slow. It took me almost all of the 28th to reach the area Borchert had discovered, and another hour and a half to find the site. It was, not surprisingly, covered in deep snow. I paced about the circular clearing and could see some large, upright stones rising up above the snow. Borchert had said something about symbols covering the stones, but I could find none. I began to wonder if this was the site after all, when I found some footprints. They were clearly those of a man wearing snowshoes, but someone lighter on his feet than I was—perhaps someone more acquainted with the shoes than I was.

I followed them north, along a narrow path I probably would not have even noticed on my own. As it grew dark I climbed over a hill and spied a cabin of old stones with a wooden roof covered in snow at the end of the path. The tracks led to the building, and the doorway had recently been cleared of blocking snow. I saw smoke rising from the small chimney.

However, as I crouched and surveyed the scene I sensed movement to my left. I turned, but saw nothing. Moments later, I heard a sound behind me, but again – at least in the dying light of the day – I could see nothing. My eyes told me I was alone, other than whoever was in the cabin, but still I felt a presence. Something was watching me.

I drew my revolver and headed down toward the cabin. It was now or never, and to be honest I felt like I'd rather confront whoever was in the cabin - cultist or no - than what seemed to be with me in the woods.

Just as I reached the door, it opened. I got a whiff of a foul stench like burning dung from within as a ~~person~~ creature - thing of some kind came out and looked at me in surprise - but nothing like the surprise I must have had on my own face at that moment. The thing looked at me with the face of a normal sized man, or at least a child, but it was only about three feet high. It could not have been a person, however, for it had no hands. Instead, it had four legs, which bent more like arms, ending in bare feet. Its face sat atop its squat, round body with no real head or neck, looking up. It wore no clothing nor had no hair, and its flesh was a pinkish red. I saw its breath just the same as I saw my own in the cold air.

Horrified, I pointed my gun at it. This was a gesture it clearly understood, and it squealed

with a voice like a cat in pain. It scrambled awkwardly back into the dim cabin, moving like a crab.

Still in shock, I stood motionless at the door. Before I knew it, I was greeted by the sight of a man—a normal man—a middle aged gent with a thick brown beard and large glasses. This, I knew from photographs, was Dr. Michael Borchert.

"Dr. Borchert," I managed. "I'm here to help!"

"Yes," he said softly. "Yes, you will."

Only then did I look down, to see that Borchert was wearing a thick leather apron, covered in blood and gore. On his left hand he wore a long white glove, equally bloody. His right, which he held up toward me, bore an ancient-looking glove of coarse fiber woven with bits of jagged wood. At the end of each finger, a long lump of old, dried flesh had been pinned to the glove. They looked like tongues. As he brought his hand closer to me, I could see that the tongues moved on their own at the end of each finger.

I recoiled instinctively, backing away from his touch. The man-crab-thing scuttled up behind Borchert and mumbled something with a frantic, high-pitched voice. I could not make out what it said. Borchert turned toward it, and I took my opportunity. I fired my pistol once, and at that close range, Borchert flew back into the house with the force of the blast.

I ran back away from the cabin, or at least as much as I could in snowshoes. It was growing very dark but I gave no thought to a night in the woods after seeing that writhing-tongue glove that Borchert wore. My flight was cut very short, however, as one of the huge trees I passed on the path reached down and grabbed me, lifting me off my feet. I saw that this bit of nightmare was no tree at all, but a gargantuan creature with long tendrils which I had mistaken for branches and a massively thick body which I had thought had been a trunk. It lumbered on two elephantine legs with me as helpless in its grasp as an infant. I quickly lost consciousness. Thomas, I cannot write any more. Even as I look out my window, I am sure that I see dark shapes moving in the snow. If I survive the night, I'll write again and tell you what happened in the woods, and after.

Sincerely,

Phillip



ART BY
MARTIN