



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,

March 3, 1931

Well, as you can surmise for yourself, I survived the night. But before I get to that, let me finish telling you what happened in the woods.

As I told you, some kind of monstrosity had loomed out of the woods and grabbed me. I had initially mistaken it for a tree, but in fact it was a unholy beast with writhing branch-like tendrils and a thick, almost trunk-like body covered in thick, leathery flesh that smelled of spoiled meat. I fell unconscious soon thereafter. I'm still not sure why.

The creature was evidently not some mindless predator, for when I awoke, shivering in the cold, I lay behind a cabin in the snow. My hands and feet were bound with thick hemp rope, and my clothes were soaking wet. Night had fallen, and the sky was filled with stars.

But I was alive! All I could think about for the first few waking moments was the fact that the creature didn't devour me or crush me in its tentacles. But had it really tied me up like this? I looked around and quickly ascertained that it was Borchert's cabin I lay behind. Now remember, Thomas, it was Dr. Borchert that I'd come to Maine to find. The missing historian had been studying an old fertility cult in the northern woods. I had discovered too late that Borchert had obviously come too close to his subject, for he clearly was some kind of demented demon worshipper himself now. My study of the Necronomicon had helped me realize that the religion was no fertility cult at all but a group of insane followers of the Old One known as Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat in the Woods with a Thousand Young.

It only took me a moment more to realize that I wasn't alone in the clearing behind the cabin. Something was moving nearby, very low to the ground. It scuttled through the snow awkwardly, coming closer and closer to me, but I couldn't turn myself enough to see it clearly.

But then suddenly it was atop me, it's fetid breath in my face. The warmth of its body repulsing me rather than comforting. It was the creature I'd seen with Borchert before - the naked, hairless, armless thing with the face of a child atop a flat, round body with four strangely bent legs. This almost crab-like creature had twisted its body horizontally so that its face angled down toward me. It gibbered with a high pitched voice that grated against the inside of my head. I had no idea what it was saying to me, if anything.

I thought I was going to be sick.

The thing prodded my face with a child-like foot, and I eventually realized that it was taunting me. I tried to roll away from it, but the snow made that too difficult, so I just struggled with the ropes.

"Get away from me!" I shouted hoarsely.

The thing made a noise like a laugh, but it did scuttle away.

I lay in the snow, pulling at my bonds for a long while. The cold stars stared down at me without compassion or mercy.

My wrists were raw, but the ropes were noticeably looser. I worked harder.

"Quit your struggling, Phillip," I heard a man's voice say.

It was Dr. Borchert. But as I related to you, I had shot him. He'd flown backwards from the point-blank blast. As he approached, I could see that his clothes were bloody and his shirt bore a large hole. However, he did not walk like a man who'd been shot a few hours earlier.

At least now I knew who had tied me up and left me here. The thing in the trees must work for Borchert. Or Borchert worked for it.

"What do you want with me?" I asked, my voice still feeble.

He held my pistol and wallet in one hand. In his other, he wore a terrible glove that looked like a thing alive-like there were writhing tongues on the end of each finger. He gestured menacingly with the glove and grinned, as though that answered my question.

Every meaning I could give to the gesture only sickened me more.

"I came here to help you," I told him.

"Yes, and you shall," he replied, still smiling. He stepped closer.

My thoughts raced back to Eli Martin, the man who I seen a day or so earlier with warped, twisted flesh. There were marks on his skin like handprints-like the kind you would find in clay after it left the hands of an inexpert sculptor.

I began to realize what that glove was, and what it could do.

"Where did the glove come from?" I was stalling for time.

He dropped my gun and wallet in the snow, and rubbed the back of the glove with his now-free hand. "This," he whispered, "is what they left behind. It is the Despoiler. The old fellowship is gone, long gone. But they left this behind. With this, the young of my lovely mistress will cause me no harm. In fact, they look upon me as one of their own."

If this was the man who was married to the kind woman I'd met back in town, he clearly had suffered some kind of psychological breakdown. His eyes glared with menace and contempt. But psychological breaks were something I had first-hand knowledge of.

"Cthulhu Fhtagn," I said as loudly as I could. His smile disappeared. His gaze narrowed.

"Shub-Niggurath!" I shouted. "The Black Goat in the Woods with the Thousand Young."

"How..." he whispered.

"The Old Ones were and the Old Ones shall be again!"

He smiled again, his eyes brightening.

I swung my still-bound legs around, catching his legs at the ankles, from behind. He went down into the snow, hard. I wrenched my hands free of the ropes and pulled myself through the snow toward where I thought my gun lay.

Borchert recovered faster than I thought he would. With an incoherent yowl he leapt at me. He landed on my back before I could get to my pistol. I rolled over underneath him and grabbed for his arms. I only got one—the one with the Despoiler. I held his forearm with both of my hands. I caught a glimpse of my own arms and saw that they were covered in blood from the ropes. The cold had numbed me more than I had thought.

He pounded me with his free fist, and tried to wrench his other arm free. When he couldn't do that, he tried to force the glove into my face. I held it away, but as I said, my hands were numb. I was stronger than him normally, I could tell, but now? I was probably fighting a losing battle.

With a quick jerk I wrenched his gloved hand into his own face as he lay next to me in the snow. I watched in shock as the tendril-like things at the ends of each finger passed into the skin on his face like it was thick pudding. I

think he would have screamed but the swipe of the Despoiler stretched flesh over his nose and mouth, sealing in the sound. The only thing intact on his now misshapen face were his eyes. They stared up at me with a terror that I don't want to give much thought to.

As he lay there in the snow I pummeled what was left of his face. When I was done, I... I don't know if he was dead or unconscious. At the time, I didn't care.

I looked around me for the four-limbed thing that had accompanied him, but it was no where around. I untied my legs and dug in the snow until I found my gun. It still had five rounds in it.

I dragged Borchert to his cabin. He didn't make any moves as I did so. When I reached the open cabin door, I saw in the dim lamplight within many books piled up on tables. I was sure that these books were filled with terrible secrets, but you know what? I've had my fill of terrible secrets. Besides, I was pretty sure that I might find some more of Borchert's "creations," like Eli Martin or the crab-man-thing in there.

I pushed Borchert into the cabin and fired my pistol at the kerosene lamp. (I'll admit, I had to fire twice to hit it.) The lamp shattered and the wick fell into the spilled oil, starting a blaze.

I shuffled away from the cabin, but not so far away that I could hope that maybe the fire would keep the thing—or things—in the woods away.

I don't remember much else about that night. I must have drifted off again, because when I awoke it was daylight and there was not much left of the cabin but a blackened pile of brittle timbers.

It took me all day to struggle and fumble my way back to Chillacost. Freezing and half out of my mind, I spoke to no one when I arrived. I went to my room and wrote you the last letter.

Last night I expected the worst. I don't know what became of the crab-man-thing, and if Borchert had something (the Despoiler?) about him that allowed him to survive a gunshot in the guts, who's to say he couldn't have survived the rest. Now I wished I'd searched the burned remains of the cabin, just to be sure. But I'd been too frightened. Too tired.

I still haven't slept much. I still don't know if I'm done. I suppose I need to talk to Borchert's wife and sister. But Good God, what do I tell them?

Sincerely,

Phillip

