



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 Janice,

December 24, 1929

I had meant to write to you earlier, but much has happened in the last few days and I've only now got out of the hospital. Let me delay no longer in telling you the good news: your brother Thomas is alive and well! Indeed a Merry Christmas for us all, although there's been no time for me to celebrate the holiday.

Let me try to go over the last few days' events for you. Perhaps in writing this letter, the details shall make more sense to me, because frankly, at the moment none of it really does. Not completely anyway.

Last I wrote, I told you that I had rescued a young man named Peter Hudson from the nefarious Silver Moon Society here in St. Louis. A woman named Sharon Mann, the daughter of Dr. Seymour Mann, was a member of some importance and seemed to have some connection with Thomas' disappearance, many weeks earlier. When I originally arrived in the city a fortnight ago, I had thought them to be a harmless social club. How wrong I was!

After seeing with my own eyes the strange machine (they called it a "temporal corresponder") that the Silver Moon Society had in the basement of their lodge headquarters, hearing the horrible voice of "the Great Race of Yith" coming from it, and dragging poor Peter out of there, I thought the worst for Thomas.

I didn't want to just give up, however. Thomas had been my friend for years, since college in fact, and we had remained as close as we could living with almost half the country separating us. I spent the day with Peter in his hospital room, hoping perhaps to learn more from him, but with no luck. He remained unconscious. The police arrived and I gave them the best report I could, leaving out the details I didn't really understand or could not yet explain. They promised to look into it, but I was afraid that I had not really given them much to go on. All they had was the word of some stranger that a number of upstanding citizens of the city were up to no good. I imagined then that they went to the Society, asked a few questions and probably little else. Surely the statement of Peter Hudson would be far more damaging, but when would that come?

As usual, I knew I had to take matters into my own hands. The next day I awoke with renewed vigor and determination.

It was a particularly cold December day, with a biting wind clawing at my trench coat as I walked to the Silver Moon Society again. I took up a position across the street and watched, hoping perhaps my break-in and the attention of the police would incur some activity in the membership. Hoping I would learn something. I noted that the police patrolled by a few times, perhaps with heightened interest, just in case my story might be true. Well, that was something, anyway.

I watched all that day and saw surprisingly little activity. After a short break for a warm dinner and some hot coffee to wash the chill away, I returned. Well after dark, I saw a woman leave the building and get into a waiting car, driven by a man. The woman was Sharon Mann. I decided that this was my cue. I had no car to follow them, but I went on a hunch that she was returning to her family estate.

It took me a half hour to get there on foot, but my hunch paid off. Lights were on in the old manor house and the car I'd seen was in the driveway. I tried to sneak up to the house, but I suppose the attention of the police had them on their guard. As I hustled across the yard, a hefty bloke in a thick winter coat intercepted me. In his hands was a lead pipe, and on his face was a snarl.

Unfortunately, the bruiser with the pipe was faster than I was, and he pounded my head - but good. I was out like a light. (Please excuse my graphic depictions.)

When I awoke, my face was pressed against a cold, stone floor. I know now that I was unconscious for almost 48 hours. Dried blood had caked in my hair. As I gathered my wits and looked around in the dim light, I saw that I was in a small room with a closed door. And I wasn't alone. Thomas lay there on the floor next to me! My head still pounding, I sat up and realized that I was in a room very similar to the one that I'd found Peter in. That meant that we were in the basement beneath the Silver Moon Society.

When I managed to rouse Thomas, he was doing far worse than I. I'm still not sure of all he had been through, but it had taken his toll. After getting over his surprise in seeing me, he told me a brief but disjointed tale. He said



that he and Dr. Mann had created a machine that would allow humans to communicate with an amazingly powerful alien race called "the Great Race of Yith." These Yithians lived far in the past but had left the concepts for the machine hidden within the layout of ancient temples and monuments. The floor plans and details of these prehistoric buildings were each a part of the blueprints for this device, apparently, and the key to it all lay in a book called the Pnakotic Manuscripts. What he and the doctor did not realize, Thomas told me, was that it was more than

a communicator. The machine allowed a Yithian to transfer his mind from the past into that of a modern human.

"That can't be good," I told him. He agreed.

After Dr. Mann died in an accident in Turkey, his daughter Sharon helped finish the machine. She was extremely dedicated and worked long hours without food or sleep in her pursuit of her father's dream. In their initial test, however, a Yithian mentally entered our time and took over Sharon Mann, he told me. He speculated that the actual mind of Sharon Mann now resided

far in the past, in the body of some terrible alien thing. She was almost certainly irrecoverably mad.

Unsure how much of this I really believed, Thomas told me that they had only kept him alive because eventually he too would have his mind switched with a Yithian. He imagined that a similar fate was in store for me. And for Peter Hudson, I realized then, before I rescued him. Could it be that somehow a weakening or mistreatment of one's physical body made it easier for the mind transfer to happen? Perhaps that's why they had beaten Peter, and clearly mistreated Thomas as well.

We had to get out of there. That was clear. The door, of course, was locked.

About then, I smelled smoke. I mentioned it to Thomas and he told me, weakly, that the initial tests of the machine had showed that it was extremely susceptible to overloading and catching fire when disturbed in the least way. I remembered the burned remains I'd found in the Mann house and knew he was right.

I began banging on the door and shouting. When I stopped, I could hear voices. Shouts. A few cries of pain. I kept banging.

Finally, the door flew open. In the doorway stood Sharon Mann. Half her face was blackened and burned, as was one shoulder, and much of one arm. Her blistered flesh literally smoked and smoldered but she appeared to take no notice of it. She babbled something with a mouth than only partially still worked, but I knew that even if she spoke clearly it was words in no human language. Possessed by some ancient alien or simply mad as a loon, I did not know, but I could tell by the look in her eyes that she — or it — blamed me for the chaos I could see behind her. People ran through a smoke-choked hallway, and even with Sharon's unintelligible accusations, I could hear confused screams and finally shouts of "This is the police! Exit the building in a calm and orderly fashion, with your hands in the air!"

Now I understood. Sharon—or whatever it was — knew that the police were here because of what I'd said. Their intervention must have upset the machine and started the fire. All of her/its plans were wrecked, and now she/it was just interested in whatever vengeance she/it could wring out of the situation.

I, on the other hand, would have none of that. I pulled Thomas to his feet and made for the door. Sharon pushed us both back with surprising strength. Thomas crashed to the floor and I had to fight to keep to my feet. A ghastly grin showed on her face now, with burned bits of her own lips staining her teeth. (Again, Janice, I hope you'll excuse the graphic portrayal — believe it or not, I am leaving out the most gruesome parts.)

While I've never struck a woman in my life, it seemed less and less likely to me that she was indeed anything resembling a human woman any longer. I closed my eyes and swung my fist. If there was a thing inside her granting her supernatural strength it still had physics to contend with and Sharon was a slight woman. The force of my blow knocked her to the ground and I wasted no time on chivalrous apologies. I grabbed Thomas and made for the door. As we ran, I heard a terrible shrieking cry come from behind us. If that sound issued from Sharon's throat, then indeed I do suspect that some inhuman agency was at its source. It struck me cold like no sound I'd heard before, despite the heat of the mounting fire, which was quickly consuming the entire structure.

The building burned to the ground, with no trace of the machine or the plans surviving. Those members of the society that escaped the fire were rounded up by the police, who have now classified them as a sadistic—and most likely murderous—cult. I doubt they've got any reliable or understandable statements from any of the members, and Thomas is keeping mum regarding many of the details as well. He did, after all, help build the machine in the first place.

Poor Peter seems to still be in a coma. His recovery would certainly be a welcome holiday gift, but the doctors give us little hope.

In any event, I don't know how much of this you believe or how much you should believe. Perhaps if it were not for the blow to my head, I could have made better sense of it all without resorting to talk of aliens and mind transference—could some of it have been a hallucination? Maybe. The important thing is, Thomas is safe and on the road to recovery. I'm sure you'll hear some of his version of the tale soon enough.

Sincerely,

Phillip Shandler

Dear Thomas,

Now that you are convalescing nicely, I am going to return to Boston. When I left there, strange things were afoot (aren't they always?)

In any event, I just wanted to write you this quick note rather than wake you. You shall hear from me soon. When you are better, I need your help in learning more about this Nyarlathotep fellow!

Phillip