

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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April 12, 1930

Dear Thomas,

I received your telegram and the wired money this morning. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the loan—I give you my word that I'll pay you back as soon as I get back to Providence and cash in some bonds.

The first thing I did today was pay Mr. Harris, the farmer who lent me his truck, for his vehicle. I told him an abbreviated version of the story that I related to you — that it was stolen from me at gunpoint while I was investigating the site where Lastbridge once stood. I promised him that I was going to try to get some justice as well. He was none too pleased with me, but the cash seemed to soften his anger.

Next of course I went to the local sheriff to report the stolen truck and provide a description of the thug that attacked me. The sheriff told me that it sounded like someone named Hank Webber, a troublemaker who lived well outside of town. Sheriff Hecks told me he'd drive out and see if he could find the truck and ask Webber some questions.

Enclosed with this letter you will find the list of those strange words I told you I would send. You'll remember that I heard these phrases in the field at night after my attack, seemingly sung by a ghostly choir. The experience is still very fresh in my mind. How could it not be? Do not mistake my experiences for hallucinations, Thomas. I firmly believe now that some supernatural force is at work here, and that the people of the tiny town of Lastbridge — the cultists who called themselves the Fellowship of the Risen God, still haunt these fields. Perhaps given the power to do so by the entity I've become all too familiar with: Nyarlathotep. I'm hoping that you can do some research and find some meaning for these strange words, or at least identify the language.

Sincerely,

Philip

April 15, 1930

Dear Thomas,

It gets worse, my friend.

It gets much worse.

Needless to say, I was a little unimpressed with Sheriff Hecks' sense of urgency in the little manner of the assault and robbery made against me. He clearly was familiar with Webber and while he called him a "troublemaker," Hecks hardly seemed sympathetic about the blow to the head the brute gave me.

You know me well enough to guess what happened next, Thomas. Yes, I went out to the Webber farm to check it out myself. Now, getting there wasn't all that easy. Obviously, I wasn't even going to try to borrow another vehicle, certain that I would get turned down anyway. And I don't have the cash to buy one, even if there was one to be purchased here in Fairfield.

So I walked, hitching a ride when I could. It took me the better part of the day to get out there, mostly because the directions I was given were faulty — or perhaps I didn't understand them. In any event, I got lost, and ended up crossing an untended field and coming at what turned out to be Hank Webber's farm from behind rather than from the road.

Except that I didn't know it was the Webber farm. I wandered amid rusted plows and weed-strangled equipment. Even a city boy like me knew that this hadn't been an operational farm for years. In fact, I had begun to think the place was abandoned until I saw a portly young boy, probably about twelve or thirteen, walk out of the old farmhouse, slamming the door behind him. He carried a rusted bucket with both hands held in front of him, obviously carrying something heavy. As he walked in the strong wind, his thin, greasy hair fluttered, and even his fat, greasy cheeks shuddered slightly.

(The wind never ceases here, Thomas. God, the wind.)

I was going to call out to him, but just as I began to raise my hand and wave I spotted something in the dirt driveway in front of the house.

Mr. Harris' truck! This must be the Webber place, I surmised. I ducked down into the tall brown grass and weeds and watched the boy carry the pail to the barn.

The barn was the most well kept building on the farm, but that's not saying much. I saw a couple of small, ramshackle outbuildings, and what looked like an empty grain bin. This was all in addition to the gray, aged farmhouse and the large barn.

The boy disappeared into the barn. I stayed low, but got a little closer. I wanted to get to the truck to see if your book, the Pnakotic Manuscripts, was still in the cab. Maybe I could even steal it back if I acted fast. I studied the house and yard for a minute to see if anyone was around besides the boy.

Just then, a car pulled up into the driveway next to the truck. The sheriff's car. Sheriff Hecks turned off the motor and got out, looking at the truck up and down, rubbing his chin. With a shake of his head and a grimace, he pulled out a notepad and began writing something.

The door to the house opened abruptly, and out lumbered the massive, dark-haired man that had attacked me and stole the car and the book. Hank Webber, just like the sheriff had thought. The two immediately began arguing, although I couldn't quite make what they said. The sheriff, however, was putting away the notepad and pulling out a pair of handcuffs.

"Good for Sheriff Hecks," I thought at the time. "He's more diligent than I thought."

But, before I could call out a warning, the greasy-cheeked boy suddenly appeared behind Hecks with a shovel raised above his head. His momentum gave the blow great force and Sheriff Hecks was thrust down onto his knees with a terrible cracking sound. The boy bore a hideous grin. Hank wasted no time. His heavy boot smashed against the lawman's neck. Hecks didn't move after that.

I readied myself to spring into action. Hank Webber was strong, I knew that from our last encounter, but right was on my side. But I hadn't moved a muscle yet when Hank pulled out the revolver I'd seen before and looked around for witnesses to his awful crime. I was still quite far away. He'd have time to get off at least three shots before I got to him.

Swallowing my rage, I stayed crouched in the grass and weeds. I waited for an opportunity.

Hank tucked the pistol in his pants and he and the boy dragged Hecks into the barn. Then, they both exited back out, Hank patting the boy on the shoulder and saying something that made the boy grin broadly. I shuddered, not sure why.

Hank got in the sheriff's car and the boy went into the house. Hank, much to my surprise, drove off.

I waited for a moment, and then scampered to the barn, staying low. If there was any chance that I could help the sheriff, I had to try. At best, though, after those blows, he was badly injured.



I crept forward and peered in through one of many holes between paint-peeling boards. I scanned the dirt floor, wanting to get a glimpse of the sheriff. I noted a terrible sour stench coming from within. It smelled like rot.

I could only make out some drag marks on the floor in the dim light. I moved to a different hole along the wall to get a better position. Suddenly, I realized something was moving inside. As the dying sunlight seeped through the numerous, slotted holes, some dark shape moved among them. The sheriff?

No, it was something bigger. It was in a barn, so I assumed it was an animal.

Oh, if only it had been.

From my new spot, I saw Hecks' still form on the ground, sprawled on some ancient wet hay. Then I heard the rattling of chains, and the shape I'd thought was an animal came close to his body.

The... thing was at least eight feet wide and almost that tall. Skin like grease-stained wax paper covered its bloated, misshapen form, yet allowed you to see the pumping, undulating organs and vessels within. Two of its thin, clawed limbs were shackled to chains, which led off into the darkness. How many free limbs

remained I could not tell, but membranous wings fluttered nervously, anxiously, atop its bulk.

Worst was its eye. Above its grotesque funnel-like mouth was a single eye divided equally into three parts with three separate pupils.

A tri-lobed eye, just like the one I'd read and heard about.

As I watched, the thing thrust its beak, or mouth, or whatever it was, into the sheriff's flesh and began to draw out a grisly, ghastly meal for itself. Hecks didn't so much as twitch, so I knew he was dead when they dragged him in the barn.

The sight of that unearthly monstrosity was like a knife in my brain that made my knees go weak. I turned to run, but suddenly was very afraid to cross those open fields at night. I don't know if I was thinking of the apparitions I'd seen before or the horrible wings on that creature that would allow it to swoop down on prey from above.

So I ran instead to the truck.

I flung open the cab door. The good news was, the key was in the ignition. The bad news

was, the book was nowhere to be seen. I didn't take much time to think about that, then, though. I started the motor and drove away from the farm without looking back, hoping I wouldn't run into the pistol-wielding Hank Webber on the road.

I didn't. I made it back to the boarding house where I'm staying. I didn't return the truck. At least for now, it's mine - I paid for it. I still feel the need to have a swift means of escape.

I literally do not know what to do now. I wrote this more to calm my nerves and record everything. At least I accomplished the latter.

This isn't like any case I've ever been on, Thomas. Things are only getting stranger and more horrible with every turn.

Sincerely,



Philip