

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 16, 1930

Dear Thomas,

I don't know about you, but there are things I'd rather wake up thinking about other than the choice to flee town, fearing that some inhuman creature would come hunting for me, or whether to stick around long enough to report the grisly murder I saw yesterday.

That is, if I can figure out who to report it to, since the victim was the sheriff himself.

Allow me to just organize my thoughts a bit, Thomas.

As you know from my last letters, my investigation into a hundred year old cult here in rural Wyoming has gone from bad to worse. Yesterday, while sneaking around the farm of Hank Webber, a man who attacked me and stole your copy of Pnakotic Manuscripts, I watched as he and his disturbed son murdered the local sheriff, Roy Hecks. Worse, I watched them feed him to some terrible... creature in their barn. This thing had a three-lobed eye, a trait I'd come to associate with the being known as Nyarlathotep.

Now, the thing is, all this time I'd come to sort of believe (yes, I admit it now—I BELIEVE) that Nyarlathotep was an intelligent—if wickedly so—man or man-like entity. A god of some sort, as worshipped by the Witch Cult back in Arkham last year. The thing in the barn was horrible and alien, to be sure (its image is imprinted on my brain like a scar), but it did not seem to be a god.

At least, not anything I'd want to be a god. If that's what the gods are, I'm not sure my sanity will hold. What kind of a world is this, Thomas? Is anything we know to be truth actually worthy of that name?

I seem to remember some reference from the Pnakotic Manuscripts about multiple forms or bodies or somesuch. Is that your recollection as well? Perhaps the entity we're dealing with can change his shape? That doesn't seem to be quite it. Images of the Greek Gods taking the forms of stags and eagles come to mind, and that all seems quite childish in this light.

Perhaps, like the gods of eastern myth, Nyarlathotep has different avatars. These different aspects of himself—itsself—would be lit-

erally different beings, and yet all would still also be him. It's hard to get hold of such a concept, but somehow it seems appropriate. Nyarlathotep is the Horned Man, or the Dark Man, of the Witch Cult, and he is the beast with the tri-lobed eye as well.

Thomas, what do I do? There's a god in a barn here in Wyoming and I think it's after me.

Sincerely,

Phillip

April 20, 1930

Dear Thomas,

Well, I feel like I've finally resolved at least something. But not like I'd planned.

I had the truck again, stolen back from that maniac Hank Webber. I'd already reimbursed the original owner for it's value, so I decided to just consider it mine. I checked the sheriff's office, but didn't find anyone there to tell about Heck's murder, so I just left. I bought five three-gallon cans of gasoline, six bottles of cheap whiskey, some rags, a lighter and some kerosene. At the feed store (which is also the place here in town that sells gasoline), the proprietor was selling an old used shotgun. I bought that, and some shells. The shotgun was double-barreled, but a bit clumsy to load. It could use some repair, but I didn't have the time to bother.

With the truck loaded up, I drove out toward the Webber farm. Just as it was within sight, I heard the roar of an engine to my right and was suddenly thrown against the steering wheel. My truck spun about a half turn, and as I slammed on the brakes it skidded, sideways, along the gravel road.

I turned back and saw Hank Webber behind the wheel of Hecks' sheriff car. He'd just rammed my truck, and steam was hissing out from under the crumpled hood. The car door opened, and I watched as he pulled out a pistol. Had he been waiting for me to come back?

The truck, however, wasn't as bad off as he must have thought. I threw it into reverse, and angled myself back straight on the road. I looked back and saw that he was slamming the car door. I hoped that his car was too banged up to come after me, but I was wrong. I still looked over my shoulder as I put it in gear and started going again. He was after me, still with steam coming from his engine. I should have waited until he was completely out of the car before I revealed that I could get away, and given myself a head start.

Worse, it was clear that the car was faster than my truck. By the time I upshifted, Hank was so close I was sure his fender must have been less than a foot from the back of my truck. He was going to ram me again. Clearly, Hank was insane. I couldn't see him through the steam, however.

Yet even worse than that, I realized that I smelled gasoline and alcohol. A glance back at my own truck bed instead of at the sheriff's car this time showed me that Hank's ram attack had broken more than one bottle and tipped over all the cans. I couldn't tell from a quick look, but from the smell, one of the cans must have come open.

The driveway to Webber's farm ahead on my left, I didn't bother with it and drove down into the ditch and up out of it again, across the farmyard. I heard more breaking glass and rattling metal cans.

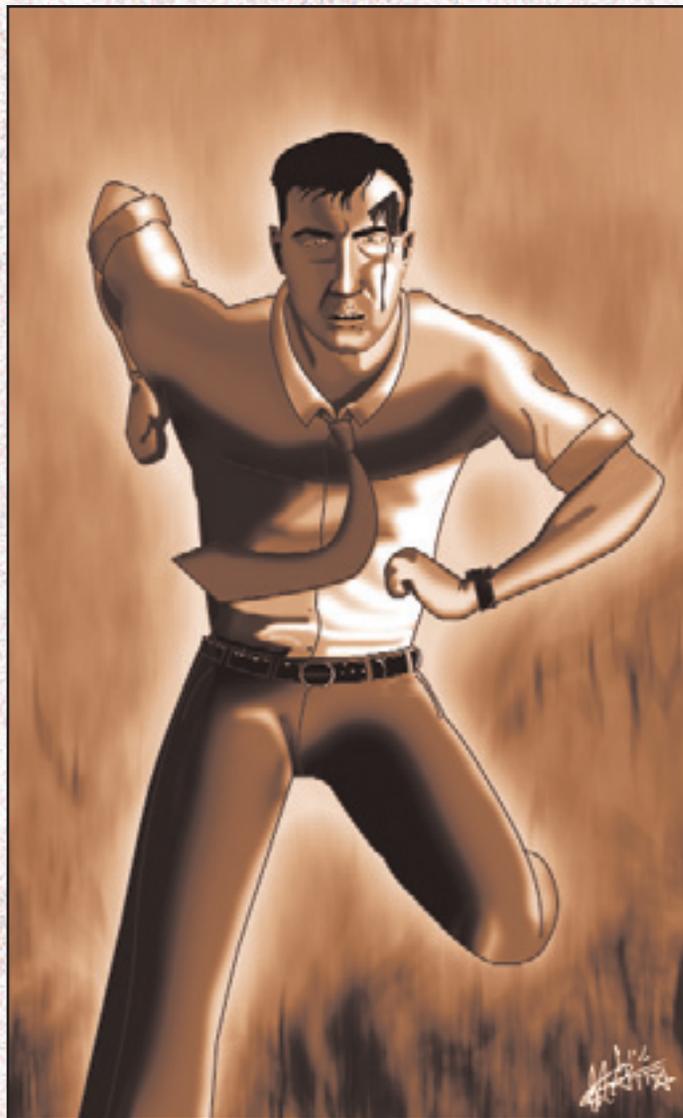
When I saw Hank's son in the driveway with a shotgun, I realized that this indeed was an ambush. They were assuming I'd come back. Well, they were right. Good for them. A blast from the kid's weapon sent a slug low through the windshield and into the seat next to me. Probably even went through into the back. A shard of glass cut my arm, but I ignored it.

I'd be dead in a few seconds anyway.

I ignored the little monster in the driveway and drove straight for the barn. This hadn't been my plan, but it was all I had now. Looking back, I saw Hank take the turn into the driveway at such a speed I thought he'd roll the car. But he kept coming. The boy was screaming something, but like I said, I was trying to ignore him.

I drove straight into the barn wall. The old boards easily shattered and splintered in the impact, although one held on long enough to smash through the windshield. The burst of glass and wood blinded me and I instinctively slammed on the brake, which was for the best, because I probably would have gone right through the other side of the barn if I hadn't.

As soon as I could manage it, I wiped the glass, dirt, and splinters from my face. My hand came away with a fair bit of blood, as well, but the fact that I could see the blood



on my hand meant I wasn't actually blinded. The dark barn churned with billowing dust and bits of hay. I could hear the motor still running. (That was a darned good truck.) Since I could see, I looked around frantically, expecting the beast to be tearing at me. Instead, I didn't see it at all.

I pulled the door handle and rolled out of the truck onto the ground. As I landed, pain shot up my left arm. I vaguely remembered slamming it against the dashboard. But my legs seemed alright.

Then, I spotted it. Rather than looming toward me, the thing huddled in the darkness of the far side of the barn. The roar of Hank's car kept me from looking at it too long, however. I pulled out the lighter with my right hand and got a flame. Tossing the lighter into the back of the truck, I scrambled to my feet and made for the barn door. There was a quick burst of flame in the truck.

The light and heat seemed to motivate the creature to act. With a shrill squeal, it lunged across the barn toward me, with pincer-like claws outstretched. However, strangely enough, Hank then saved my life. Like the lunatic he was, he drove his stolen car right into the back of the truck. Maybe he was trying to push it out of the barn, I don't know. However, he managed to push the truck right into the inhuman thing instead. That knocked it aside and off balance. The truck turned about ninety degrees around into a post in the exact center of the barn, and the back crumpled with the car imbedded into it. I got to the door and opened it.

The boy was running toward the car, so I ran out and across the back yard. There was a flare behind me and I stopped, shielding my face with my good arm. I was expecting a huge explosion, but it never came. Instead, as the fire got into the gasoline and kerosene, it just burned hotter and brighter. The barn went up into flame.

I didn't think that the fire would be enough to kill that horrible creature.

However, then I saw a strange thing. The burst of flame reached up into the timbers of the roof, and, coupled with the impact of no less than two cars, a good portion of the roof collapsed down. For a moment, I saw the thing in the daylight—it's multitude of arms and legs, its barrel-like body, and its horrible eye—and it simply faded away. As if it just couldn't sustain the light.

It was gone.

There's more to tell, Thomas, but I'm tired now. I'm writing this from a hospital bed in Fairfax and the nurse is standing over me with a stamped envelope, threatening me with medication if I don't get some sleep. I wish that was the end of the tale regarding that day at the farm, but it wasn't. Not by a long shot.

Sincerely,



Phillip