

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

188 Gibson Lane

Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Janice,

December 14, 1929

I am writing to you in regard to your brother Thomas. As you know, Thomas and I have been friends for years, having both attended Miskatonic University together for a time. We have kept in touch ever since. He has helped me in a number of cases since then in my work as a private investigator.

A few months ago, I noticed that Thomas was not responding to my letters. At first, I just assumed that he was very busy with his new project, but eventually I became worried. I contacted a mutual friend, Mary Millar, to check on him. She found his place in disarray, so I came to St. Louis to investigate.

I know that Thomas was working with a Dr. Seymour Mann on some sort of big project. Thomas had mentioned to me in his message that the work involved some sort of machine, which is very curious, of course, since Thomas is a historian and antiquarian. I never knew he had any knowledge or talent for mechanics, did you?

I arrived this morning and went straight to Thomas' house, which I believe was your family's house when you grew up, was it not? In any event, I approached the elegant but ancient two-story house with trepidation. Mary had already told me that she found the back door open, so I made my way through the tree-filled yard to the back. Sure enough, I found the door unlocked. Some scratch marks on the door-sill made me fairly sure that the lock had been jimmed. I cautiously entered the kitchen.

Finding my way into the living room, I found papers and books scattered everywhere, and many drawers and cabinets hanging open. What I had thought, from Mary's description, to be signs of a struggle were in fact signs of a hurried search. My investigator's instinct told me that Thomas had not been around when someone broke in, looking for something. But where was Thomas? And who broke in?

It didn't look like a burglary. Valuables lay untouched in the house. I looked at the books for a while, and saw that many were in Latin and Greek, which I could not understand. A few were in English and French (which I know a bit of). They were books on ancient history—Sumerians, Babylonians, and that sort of thing. They seemed to focus on myths and religion, and particularly on religious sites. History is not my strong suit, so it did not mean much to me. The papers seemed to be notes in Thomas' hand, specifically dealing with temples and temple architecture. He had even sketched a few floor-plans and whatnot but nothing appeared finished. Perhaps whoever broke in took the more finished notes and plans? But why?

Janice, if there is any light you can shed on any of these topics, it would be of great help. When is the last time you heard from him?

Please get back to me as soon as you can. You can reach me by letter or cable at the Arbor Inn here in St. Louis.

Sincerely,

Dear Janice,

December 16, 1929

Thank you for your telegram. I had been looking for more information on Dr. Mann, and had come up virtually empty handed. Your clue about the doctor's involvement with the Silver Moon Society, however, led me to some interesting conclusions.

I did some checking and learned that the Silver Moon Society is a local group of highly educated people interested in ancient history and religion. They keep an old house here in St. Louis as a gathering point for their members. I visited there just this morning and spoke with a Mr. Astorath. Apparently, Thomas joined the group last April. Soon after, he began working with Dr. Mann to work out some sort of pattern found in ancient temple architecture. As strange as it sounds, Mann believed that he

could use these patterns to create some kind of machine. I have no idea what he thought it would do. But he died somewhat mysteriously gathering data on an expedition in Turkey nine months ago. His daughter, Sharon Mann, however, still lives here in St. Louis, or at least she did recently. Apparently Sharon Mann and Thomas continued the work at Mann's house south of the city. I'm going to investigate there next.

The people at the Silver Moon Society have been very helpful, and were eager to learn what I knew about their new member Thomas. Hopefully, we'll figure out where Thomas is soon, and everything will turn out to be fine. Thank you again for your help. I will stay in touch.

Sincerely,

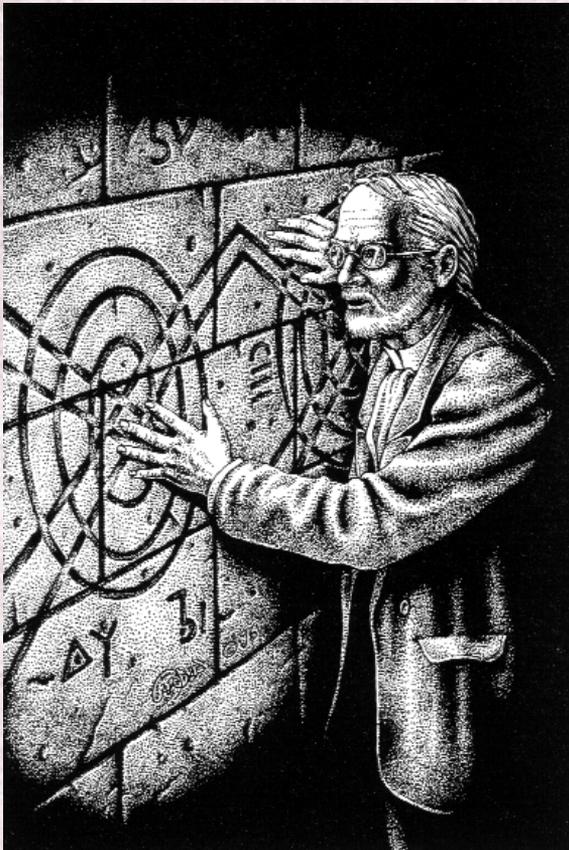


Dear Janice,

December 18, 1929

Oh how wrong I was about the Silver Moon Society!

I went to the Mann estate yesterday and found it deserted. I searched through the old house (entering illegally—but I was desperate) and found very little except some family photographs to give me an idea of what Seymour and Sharon Mann looked like. I was going to give



up and leave, but then I came to the basement door. Lighting my flashlight, I went down into the cold, dark place below the house.

There were indications on the floor that something large and metallic had stood within the main basement room, although nothing remained of it. Probably Dr. Mann's machine. There were signs of a small, recent fire in the room, and to my horror a few blood stains. I also found a wooden bench with an old notebook with notes in a handwriting that I recognized to be Thomas'. I also found a book called the Pnakotic Manuscripts that was very old and burned, probably damaged in the same fire that had blackened the floor and one wall here in the basement. It was a strange book, written in English, but claiming to be a translated version of an ancient manuscript. It was deeply disturbing as I paged through it, but it was clearly a book on strange religious practices and magic. It spoke of some people of prehistory called Yithians, who seemed to be well-versed in machines that could accomplish fantastic deeds. (This is obviously nonsense, of course—I've heard of Sumerians and whatnot, but never Yithians. And of course the people of such antiquity did not have machines.)

I immediately went to the Silver Moon Society to report to Mr. Astorath what I had found and ask more questions. No one answered the door, and it was locked. I turned to go, but as I got only half a block away I saw an older gentleman approach the house and, after giving a suspicious glance around, he went up to the side of the building and opened a hidden door. He had not seen me. My instincts told me something was amiss, so I went up to the same spot and, after a bit of searching, found a secret knob that opened the door again. A dark staircase led down under the house.

As I descended into my second dank basement of the day I heard some strange noises ahead. I kept my flashlight off and felt my way through the dark down the stone steps. Soon, I saw a pale light ahead and inched toward it. The sounds were that of the droning of an electrical machine and the voices of a number of people. I rounded a corner and saw a bizarre sight.

The Silver Moon members were gathered in a central room around what I assume was Dr. Mann's machine. It was a squat metal turbine connected to what appeared to be a window framed in brass nodules and all manner of wires. The window crackled with red lightning. The Silver Moon members, including Sharon Mann, stood around the window and spoke to it in a language I could not begin to identify, let



alone understand. Worst of all, however, from the window came a mind-wrenching sound that I have to describe as a voice, but it was no human's voice—of that I am sure. It chilled my very soul to hear it, and I retreated back the way I came.

But my trepidation at the sound of the voice proved to work in my favor, Janice, for I backed into another underground passage. I explored it, both out of curiosity and because it took me away from the horrible machine and the voice. At the end, I found a room where a man was unconscious, beaten, and bound with rope—oh, how I hoped it was Thomas! But it was not. He was unknown to me.

Still, the Silver Moon Society, I now knew, was up to nothing good, and this poor man needed help. Fortunately for me, he was a slight young lad and so when I could not rouse him easily, I hoisted him on my back in a fireman's carry and made for the stairs. We slipped out without incident, for the members of the group were still intent on their mysterious task. I brought the young man to my room at the Arbor Inn.

That was last night. I checked his wallet and learned that his name was Peter Hudson. I also found some photographs there, including one where Peter stood next to Thomas and Dr. Mann. I began to frantically attempt to revive him, since he would perhaps know more of Thomas' whereabouts. My attempts to tend to his wounds did not seem to help, though, and he was quite feverish. The most I could get from him were delusional whispers. He mentioned "the Great Race of Yith," "the temporal responder," as well as what I think was the name of the book I'd found—the Pnakotic Manuscripts. When I saw that he was beyond my help, I took Peter to a nearby hospital. After mailing this letter, I am going to go check on the lad and see if he gained consciousness. Perhaps his testimony will bid me to contact the police as well.

What was Thomas up to with these people? What has become of him? I swear to you I will find out, Janice. If Sharon Mann or the Silver Moon Society has harmed him (as they clearly harmed poor Peter Hudson for some reason), they will be brought to justice. I swear that as well. You will hear from me again soon.

Sincerely,

*Phillip*