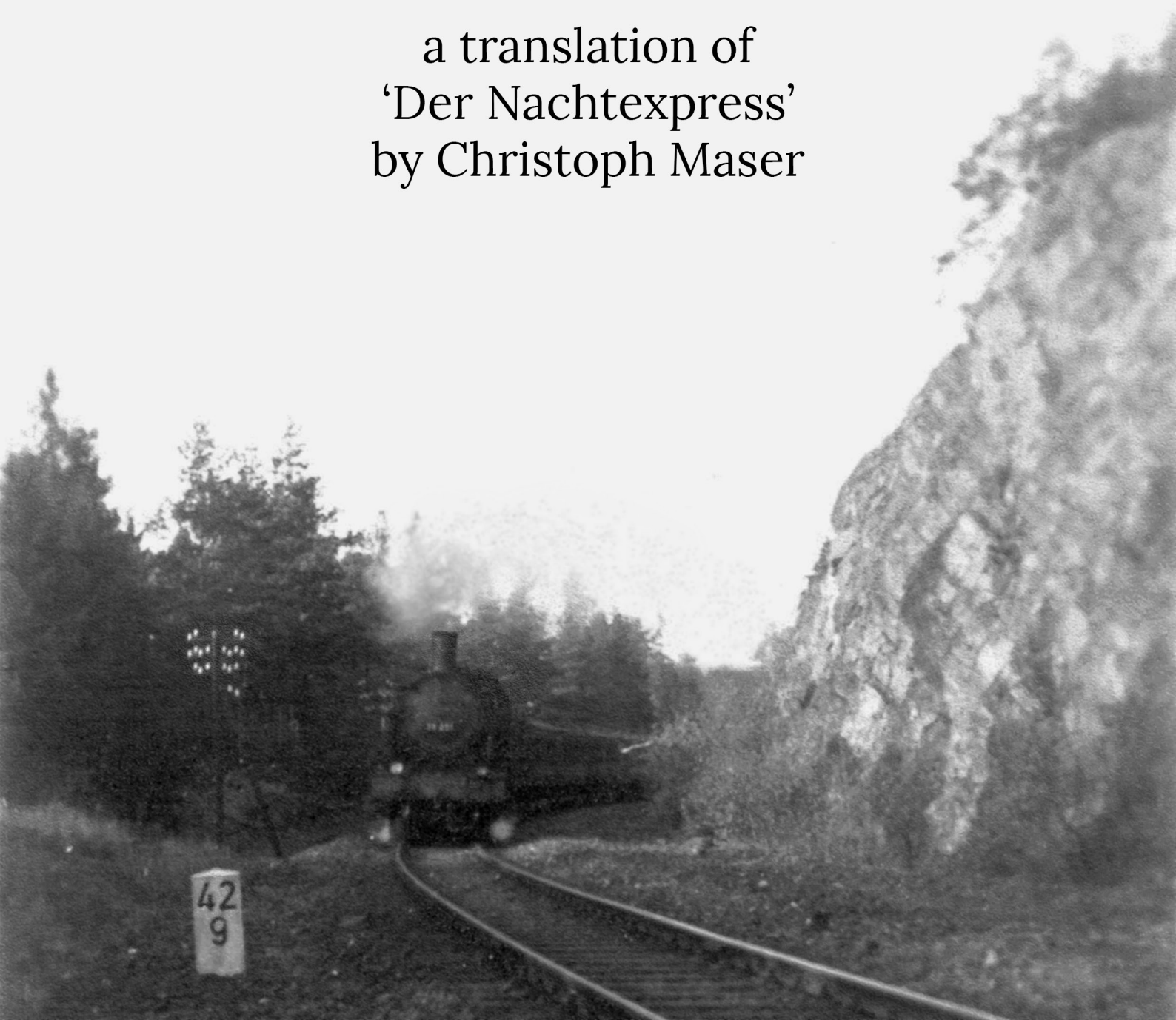


Call of Cthulhu

THE NIGHT EXPRESS

a translation of
'Der Nachtexpress'
by Christoph Maser



THE NIGHT EXPRESS

By Christoph Maser, Translated by Endwalker

Der Nachtexpress (The Night Express) is an adventure written by Christoph Maser for the German edition of the Call of Cthulhu Roleplaying game, published by Pegasus Spiele. It is a common introductory scenario, similar to The Haunting for the English-language edition. I've always been intrigued by peoples stories of running this particular scenario, and I couldn't see that anyone had translated into English, so I figured I'd give it a shot. My German is pretty rusty (read: nearly non-existent) but Google translate has come on leaps and bounds. I'd suggest grabbing a copy of *Der Nachtexpress* (which is available for free from Drive Thru RPG at the time of writing) as it contains a map of the train.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Night Express, a short adventure for Call of Cthulhu. The Night Express takes place aboard a train travelling between Frankfurt and Berlin in the winter of 1925, though it could be moved elsewhere in the world with little effort. This scenario is most suited to beginners and less experienced players (both with the Cthulhu Mythos and the game in general). It can be interwoven into an existing campaign as an interlude or used as a one-shot. The scenario can be completed in less than two hours, depending on how much your group wants to interact with the people aboard the train and roleplay their characters. There are no special requirements for the investigators. However, this scenario may work best if it is the characters first contact with the Cthulhu Mythos.

Keeper Note

The adventure references HP Lovecraft's "The Music of Erich Zann". Knowledge of the story isn't necessary to run or play this scenario, but those more versed in the Mythos may recognize the name of Zann when it crops up in the course of the adventure. This is a red herring; while the music plays an important role, it is not the driving force of this particular adventure.

BACKGROUND

Jan Marek Rachmanik was born in Prague twenty-six years ago and is considered one of the best pianists in Eastern Europe. The effervescent young artist is now on tour in Western Europe accompanied by Dr. Albrecht Dahm, who is his friend, mentor and manager, and who ensures that

the Czech prodigy makes it to all of his concerts. The positive press surrounding Rachmanik's previous concerts, and the enthusiasm of the audience have ensured that the Czech pianist enjoys a very high profile. As a result, Jan Marek Rachmanik is not only a guest of concert halls worldwide, but a socialite invited to many private parties and affluent homes.

Four weeks ago, while Rachmanik was in Paris visiting the private residence of a fan, he and Dahm came upon a collection of papers from the estate of a certain Erich Zann. These documents had passed through many hands and finally landed in those of their host, who presented them to her two visitors as a curious gift. Amongst the notes, Rachmanik found several densely written pieces of sheet music; the first two movements of a chaotic symphony which seemed to violate any conventions of rhythm and harmony with which Rachmanik was familiar.

To most, this would seem the work of untalented musician (or, indeed, a broken mind), but it fascinated Rachmanik and he became somewhat obsessed by the piece. Despite the disapproval of Dahm, the young pianist experimented with the music for hours, trying mould it into something that he could offer his hungry European audiences. Dahm despaired of his protégé's growing obsession with the music which, the Doctor feared, threatened to ruin the young pianists reputation should he ever perform the music on stage. Exhausted from the stress of the tour, Rachmanik's fixation with the strange piece tipped from obsession into delusion.

Dahm intended to burn the music and end Rachmanik's fixation, but the sinister secret of the music was soon to be revealed to the Doctor. As the Dahm held the papers before the light of the fireplace, he discovered a heavily faded manuscript of considerable age hidden beneath confused and sloppy musical notation, now revealed to him under the light of the dancing flames. His interest was piqued; this manuscript captivated him, practically challenging him to uncover its secrets.

The Doctor tried to decipher the writing; a text partly written in Latin, and partly in an unfamiliar tongue. The text was so faded that Dahm could barely read it, even with the aid of a magnifying glass. The manuscript refused to reveal its secrets to the Doctor, and like Rachmanik before him, Dahm soon became obsessed.

But unlike the young musician, whose obsession was fed by the stresses and strains of his newfound fame, the Doctor had become the victim of something much more sinister; the ancient pages he sought to decrypt enthralled him; bewitched him – they will inevitably drive him to insanity. Unbeknownst to the Doctor, these hidden writings are an arcane ritual; a travel spell that opens a gate to Carcosa, and the throne of the King in Yellow. Once completed, the spell will call a Byakhee through the gateway, who will come to carry the papers, as well as the one who used them, to the King's court.

Like Rachmanik and Dahm, the characters are travellers on The Night Express between Frankfurt and Berlin. On this fateful journey, the Doctor will unintentionally unlock the secrets hidden within those pages, and conjure up death, and not just his own!

OVERVIEW

The adventure is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled "Dinner on the Rails", serves to introduce Dr. Albrecht Dahm and the young Jan Marek Rachmanik, as well as the others aboard the train. In addition to engaging in roleplay and getting to know the other travellers, the characters will experience a distressed Rachmanik and a surprisingly composed Dahm. Later that evening, the travellers will be kept busy with the increasingly crazy pianist.

In the second section, "Interlude", the characters witness the pianist's psychological breakdown reach frightening proportions. While Dahm succeeds in calming his protégé, blood is inadvertently spilt, soaking the old manuscript pages. Only when he returns to his sleeping compartment does Dahm notice that human blood has made the faded writing legible. Needing a good deal of blood to read all the pages, he begins to draw blood from the sedated Rachmanik. At the end of his reading, the insane Doctor unintentionally manages to activate a spell which opens a portal into Hastur's realm. Unbeknownst to the investigators, the portal is slowly consuming the train and through it, a Byakhee has entered our world.

In the last part, entitled "The Night Concert", the characters are awakened by loud piano playing. Rachmanik, weakened by the loss of blood and now insane, sits in the dining car and plays the piano loudly, his body disfigured by the countless cuts that Dahm has inflicted upon him. His piano

playing, the growing portal, and the Byakhee's constant attacks on the train will quickly make it clear to the investigators must act. But can they figure out source of the disaster?

THE RAILWAY CARS

The express train *Richard Wagner* pulls exquisite saloon and sleeping carriages (named VIII and VII respectively); both magnificent show-pieces of the Reichsbahn. Two conductors, who also work as service staff, take care of the guests, who can take advantage of the luxurious saloon car (which sports five dining tables), or the comfortable sleeping car (which sports double cabins with sprung beds). The train and coaches described are not any particular historical model, but are based on the various models of this era.

The cars are not the newest, but are in exceedingly good condition and very well maintained. Wood and lacquered metal form the walls and ceilings, and the decor is dominated by fabrics, upholstered furniture and exquisite paintings depicting many German sights; from the Alps to Zwickau. The saloon car even sports a magnificent piano. Lamp feet, glasses and decanters are wider than usual, so as not to fall over with the vibrations of a moving train.

Few people can afford to travel in such luxury. In a campaign, the Keeper may need to consider the reason for the presence of the investigators – unless they have their own financial resources, they may have accepted an invitation, or be the beneficiaries of a rather fortunate booking error.

The dinner, served at the beginning of the adventure is brought aboard from selected restaurants from along the route and served from the on-board kitchen. The two conductors speak several languages and are committed to giving their guests the most enjoyable journey possible. Of course, they are also happy to serve the travellers coffee at any time.

The Railway cars in play

Behind the locomotive there is a secure luggage car, the sleeper car and finally the saloon car. The two luxury cars are completely isolated from the rest of the train. The individual wagons are mounted from the outside, and only the sleeping car and saloon are connected. Once the train departs, it is not possible to get to the steam engine or luggage car (or any other cars that the Keeper may wish to be connected) without climbing over the roof as the train moves.

The two conductors can communicate with the steam engine by telephone, if necessary. The food is ready-prepared by big hotels along the route and delivered to the stations and recorded there. The train departs Frankfurt at 8:30pm and travels non-stop through the night to Berlin, arriving at 7:15 in the morning if everything goes to plan. To allow guests to sleep through the night, the train runs at a little over 30 miles per hour; rather slowly. The train will only stop in case of a serious emergency. Needless to say, the nervous breakdown of one of the passengers is not sufficient for the train to stop.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The statistics for each of the characters aboard this train can be found at the end of this document.

Jan Marek Rachmanik (26)

The twenty-six year old Czech musician comes from impoverished beginnings. He had little education and, although he is poor at reading and writing, he is a virtuoso pianist. Unfortunately the stress and pressure of the tour, as well as the constant public attention, have strained the musician to breaking point. When the investigators first meet Rachmanik, he appears shy and reserved and will only willingly converse with his mentor and manager, Dr. Albrecht Dahm. If the investigators try to speak with the pianist, he talks in a low voice without making eye contact. Those who invade upon his person space will find that Rachmanik becomes easily irritable and exasperated.

Stress has led him to become obsessed with the sheet music; he gives it his complete attention. Dahm provides Rachmanik with Barbiturates to help him remain calm and sleep. The characters should experience Rachmanik as unpredictable and perhaps disturbed. A successful Psychology roll will easily recognize that the Czech is nervous, tense and stressed; he could suffer a panic attack or worse at any moment.

Due to the wounds inflicted upon Rachmanik later in the scenario, he has only 7 hit points in the third part of the adventure.

Dr. Albrecht Dahm (54)

Doctor Albrecht Dahm is in his mid-50s and a man of considerable stature. He is a Doctor of Slavonic Studies and speaks several European languages

fluently. This, his self-taught skills in the field of music, and his connections across the continent have led him to be the perfect person to accompany Jan Marek Rachmanik on his tour. Dahm appears sympathetic and worried about his obviously stressed protégé. He looks more like a father figure than a tour leader and will apologise for the missteps of Rachmanik. The characters should see Dahm as a nice man worried about his friend. But though Dahm is initially very much loyal to Rachmanik, exposure to the papers and their unusual properties has begun to erode his psyche.

Conductor Karl Heinz Heffner (44)

The Berliner worked in a luxury hotel up until the Great War; first as a lobby boy and porter and then at the reception desk. He was badly wounded serving on the Western Front, which causes him to walk with a limp. He doesn't acknowledge the injury, but it prevents him from undertaking greater physical activity. When the Reichsbahn was looking for qualified personnel who could adequately serve affluent guests on the railway, Heffner reported immediately and is employed upon the Night Express. He is a conductor, waiter and manager rolled into one. Heffner is very competent and has experienced a lot in this line of work: while on duty, he has witnessed two births, three natural deaths (two heart attacks, and one regrettably caused by a fish bone), and even a duel between two fierce rivals.

In the first two parts of the adventure, Heffner will not allow himself be distracted by Rachmanik's behaviour. In the presence of two caregivers, Prof. Handler (see below) and Dahm, he does not worry himself with the pianist, and instead goes about his duties as if nothing is happening (at least to the best of his abilities).

Conductor Friedhelm Beust (51)

Although he is older than Heffner, Beust is second-in-command aboard the train. He has little contact with the guests and spends more time working in the kitchen or maintaining the cabins. He is stiff and proper in his manner, imitating an English butler (which is touching at first, but can begin to border on parody).

Karl Georg Schlenk, Baron von Richtenberg (45)

Karl Georg Schlenk, Baron von Richtenberg is a fellow guest and will accompany the investigators at their dinner table, engaging them in polite

PART I

DINNER ON THE RAILS

conversation. Throughout the scenario, he tries to help the investigators, but they may find him more of a hindrance. Baron von Richtenberg belongs to the Prussian high-society and owns several factories.

He expresses great regret for the collapse of the monarchy ("At least you knew where you stood with the monarchy!") but is pleased about the opportunities that the Weimar Republic and its good connections offer him ("If you know how to open the right doors, the Republic offers many opportunities!"). He has a radical attitude towards economic policy, German history ("The past is the past – the future lies ahead!") and sport ("Boxing? How uncivilized! The nobility, have been fighting each other for generations the old fashioned way – by horse and blade! None of this 'boxing gloves' or 'leather balls' nonsense!"). This can lead to interesting table discussions.

Von Richtenberg has a small pistol in his cabin, which deals 1D6+3 damage and has 6 rounds. The Keeper should feel free to kill-off the Baron in the final part of this adventure.

Miss Margarete Weissholt (28)

Miss Weissholt is an attractive young woman from Berlin, on the way back from a visit with relatives. She earns her living as a secretary in a large Berlin business and can afford the expensive ticket with the help of her fiancé, who owns the aforementioned business and whom she intends to marry in just a few weeks. Miss Weissholt is not averse to a little chat, but shows no particular interest in Rachmanik and his music. "True music", she says, "has to appeal to the heart... and the legs!" – she is a great advocate of modern dance music. The Keeper should feel free to kill-off Miss Weissholt in the final part of this adventure.

Professor Richard Georg Handler (62)

Professor Handler can be used if there is no doctor among the investigators, or you feel like there are too few patrons on the train. The tall and spindly lecturer from Nuremberg teaches at the local university and is a recognized physician specializing in cardiology. He will support the characters as much as possible. The Keeper should feel free to kill-off the Professor in the final part of this adventure.

The part of the scenario allows the investigators to get acquainted with one another as well as the other travellers, including Rachmanik and Dahm (and their problems). The investigators board the train at 8:30pm in Frankfurt, which soon begins steaming north through the bad winter weather. It is well below freezing and is snowing heavily.

The investigators can start the journey with a hot tea or a sip of port wine and settle into their cabins, where their hand luggage has been brought by porters. Larger suitcases travel separately in the luggage car, positioned between the luxury coaches and the locomotive, which cannot be accessed while the train is moving. At 9:00pm food is served in the saloon car; a clear broth, followed by steak tartare and fried potatoes, with French cheeses served after. The characters are free to sit where they please. Dahm and Rachmanik sit alone at a table; Rachmanik does not enjoy socialising. The other non-player characters – if used – occupy the other tables or may sit with the investigators.

There are a number of topics of conversation that may come up during the meal:

- The Treaty of Locarno, which was ratified on in December 1925. With this, Germany recognizes the western border defined in the Treaty of Versailles.
- Professor Richard Adolf Zsigmondy (University of Göttingen – Chemist), James Frankl (University of Göttingen – Physics) and Gustav Hertz (University of Halle – Physics) receive the Nobel Prize.
- In October, Germany wins with 4-0 against the Swiss national football team,
- The Charleston is a new dance craze in Berlin.
- A major fire in Frankfurt raged a few days ago, which injured two dozen people.

Regardless of what the investigators are up to during this time, they are likely to hear a quarrel between Dahm and Rachmanik. Both speak German, although Rachmanik does so in an Eastern European accent. Rachmanik looks very nervous and seems to be under a lot of pressure. He keeps asking Dahm to give him the "papers." In addition, he expresses several times the urgent desire to sit down at the piano and play. Dahm remains calm with his companion, asking Rachmanik several times to calm himself, imploring him not to make a

scene. Rachmanik insists he must continue his work, "because in those pages lies great art."

At some point Rachmanik loses his temper, storms out of the saloon, leaving the car for almost half an hour. During the altercation Dahm politely insists that other passengers don't get involved. Interference from other travellers (the investigators included) is likely to upset Rachmanik even further. As soon as Rachmanik has stormed out of the car however, Dahm will apologize to the other passengers. He will introduce himself and Rachmanik and will emphasize Rachmanik's special talent on the piano.

If the players care to listen, Dahm will explain how Rachmanik comes from a poor family and, while he can speak German, he cannot otherwise read or write (it is important that the investigators learn this detail as it becomes relevant in the third part of this scenario; the investigators will be able to deduce that the notes on the sheets could not possibly have been written Rachmanik himself).

Dahm will apologise for Rachmanik's mood, which he explains is down to the pressures of the tour. He also explains Rachmanik's recent fixation on the strange sheet music they were gifted by a fan in Paris. If the characters ask, Dahm will even show the characters some of the pages, which are collected inside a heavily worn folder that once belonged to one Erich Zann (his name appears on the cover of the folder). Characters with an appropriate educational background or skills will find that the symphony on the sheets is a miserable concoction; the work of a completely talentless composer. It is easy for such an investigator to tell that the music will sound awful and that the composition is not remarkable or special in any way, despite Rachmanik's insistence to the contrary. The investigators will not notice the hidden writing in this light, but may note that Dahm deals with the papers rather carefully. If the investigators mention this, he insists that despite the quality of the music, he feels that the documents likely hold historical or artistic significance of some kind, so he wishes to handle them carefully.

Later in the evening, Rachmanik returns to the dining car. Dahm discretely medicates the pianist with barbiturates to calm him and a more serene Rachmanik soon sits down at the piano and begins to play for the other travellers. Among his repertoire, he performs some piano sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven and the "Gaspard de la nuit"

by Maurice Ravel. His outstanding talent is made all the more fascinating by the range of minor quirks he introduces to his performance: he closes his eyes tightly and cocks his head to one side, makes faces and gently taps a counter-rhythm with his foot. His playing does not however involve any supernatural elements.

By 11:00pm most of the travellers have returned to their cabins. If some characters wish to remain in the saloon car, the two train attendants, Heffner and Beust will stay awake with them, (as they are required to do so by the regulation), but they will both be clearly very tired. At around midnight, the attendants insist that investigators return to their cabins, since breakfast will be served at 6:15am.

Overview of Dinner on the Rails

The investigators board train and are shown to their cabins. Over dinner, they chat with the other travellers. They witness the dispute between Dahm and Rachmanik, whom they may recognize as famous musicians. Dahm asks that his fellow travellers don't get involved and eventually Rachmanik storms from the car. In the Rachmanik's absence, Dahm apologises to his fellow passengers and explains the situation. He will gladly show you the sheet music to the investigators, who will not notice the hidden nature of the documents. When Rachmanik has calmed, he finally demonstrates his outstanding ability on the piano to the delight of those present.

PART II INTERLUDE

Despite medication, Rachmanik cannot sleep and at 1:30am, returns to the saloon car, sheet music in hand. He sits at the piano and begins to play. Heffner tries to dissuade the pianist, warning that he will disturb the other guests, but Rachmanik ignores him, and soon the Baron von Richtenberg is roused and storms angrily to the saloon to object to the racket. This yelling also awakens the investigators and other passengers.

When they arrive in the dining car, they find the half-dressed pianist hammering at the piano, reading from the sheet music Dahm had shown them earlier that evening. Baron von Richtenberg, wrapped in a fashionable dressing gown, looms over the artist and demands that he cease so that the Baron might get a decent night's sleep. The Baron becomes increasingly aggressive, but Rachmanik is dismissive. Heffner asks the characters for help defusing the situation, but the

pianist will not be reasoned with. Dahm is the last person to arrive at the saloon car; he had gone to bed with earplugs and a light sleep aid.

In the course of this scene, someone present should suffer some minor injury that bloodies the sheet music. Whether this is from Rachmanik himself, Dahm, Heffner, Baron von Richtenberg or one of the other travellers is unimportant, but a small amount of blood should come in contact with the papers.

Here are some ideas:

- The Baron decides to regain his right to sleep by force! Perhaps he gives Rachmanik a resounding slap, causing the artists lip or nose to bleed.
- In the excitement, one of the passengers pulls the emergency brake! The sudden braking throws everyone off balance. A successful DEX check will allow the investigators to remain on their feet, but failure sees them fall, suffering 1D2 points of damage. As much attention was paid to safety when building the car, there are still plenty of ways to get injured during the ensuing fall: Broken crystal tumblers or china breakfast dishes, low door frames, loose hand luggage and hand-rails may be responsible for injury. Whether the train stops or merely slows is up to the Keeper, but Heffner will give an all-clear to the locomotive as soon as possible, so that the journey is continued without delay.
- It may be Dahm himself who unintentionally bloodies the documents. He cuts himself on the edge of the music or injures himself in a tussle with Rachmanik.

In any event, when Rachmanik sees that the papers have been bloodied, he begins having a panic attack, gasping for breath and stammering about how the priceless sheet music is ruined! It will take a lot of good persuasion, a fast-acting sedative, or a strong alcohol to get Rachmanik back to bed. Any Doctor can undoubtedly diagnose a panic attack or nervous breakdown without a roll.

Overview of Interlude

The investigators are awakened by the protests of the Baron over Rachmanik's crazed night-time piano playing. Arriving in the saloon car, they find the pianist half-dressed, being chided by the Baron. Dahm eventually intervenes in the dispute, but Baron von Richtenberg loses his composure and strikes Rachmanik, or the train's emergency brake is operated. Either way, in the chaos a few drops of blood stain the sheet music. Rachmanik sees this

and begins to panic. He can only be subdued by good persuasion, very strong alcohol or a sedative.

PART III

THE NIGHT CONCERT

Dahm returns Rachmanik and the bloodied papers to their compartment. Upon further inspecting the papers Dahm finds he is now able to read the document; the spilled blood mingles with the faint letters bringing the cryptic arcane writings hidden beneath the musical scrawl into sharp focus. Though he has hidden it well so far, Dahm's mind is beginning unravel – the power of the manuscript taking hold.

However, he will need more blood to read the rest of the manuscript. Becoming delusional, he begins to inflict small cuts on the sedated pianist with a pocket knife, rubbing the bloodied blade on the pages. With a pencil he frantically scribbles notes around the edges of the pages, mouthing the revealed words as he does so. Quickly, the nature of the manuscript becomes frightfully clear, and Dahm experiences a moment of dreadful clarity. Whether he intended to or not, Dahm has opened a portal to Carcosa.

Black mist silently envelops the train's rear carriages. The Doctor becomes aware of the presence of a winged creature; he cannot hear it, but he certainly feels it. Dahm loses consciousness, but Rachmanik begins to regain his. Coming to, he sees his unconscious mentor, the bloodied knife and the many small cuts on his own body. Glancing out of the window into the blackness, he catches a clear view of a winged creature, a Byakhee. This is too much for his already cracked mind. He gathers the notes and runs into the saloon car to seek solace in the only thing that has always given him support – the piano.

The Beginning of the End

The characters are awakened again. Barely ninety minutes have passed since the incident in the saloon car. A scream rings out over the rumble of the train. Investigators who make their way to the saloon come upon Rachmanik, who has returned to the piano. He plays frantically, half-standing, half-sitting. He hammers the keys in an insane fervour, mostly naked; his body defaced with more than three-dozen small cuts, some of which are still bleeding. The bloodied pages of sheet music are scattered on the piano before him. Those witnessing the scene suffer 1/1D3 points of SAN

damage. The characters cannot see anything unusual from windows of the car. Only blackness and swirling snow.

Rachmanik won't be calmed; even further sedatives won't stop him now. It is easy to see that the Czech slipped into insanity. Those seeking help from Dahm will find him unconscious on the floor of his cabin. At first glance, it looks like he has been bludgeoned; he struck his head as he passed out. He will eventually regain consciousness, though he needs a few moments to come to his senses.

In their compartment there is the small, bloodied pocket knife, obviously the source of Rachmanik's wounds. The investigators have little time to think on the situation: something heavy lands on the roof with a violent thud, rocking the coaches. Those looking out of the windows won't be able to see it; only swirling snow and the blackness, but the Byakhee has arrived.

The Middle of the End

The only way to find out what's on the roof of the train is for some brave soul to exit the car into the blizzard, and climb to the roof. Train attendant Friedhelm Beust will insist that it is his duty to undertake this daunting task. Heffner might protest, but his disability prevents him from carrying out the duty himself. If one of the investigators offers to go, Beust or Heffner will protest.

It does not matter if Beust goes out first or follows one of the characters on the icy platform at the end of the train; Beust quickly becomes the first victim of the Byakhee, who snatches him and pulls him violently into the darkness. Onlookers will perceive little more than a great dark shape envelop him and drag him into the sky. Beust disappears into the darkness and, while he can no longer be seen, he can be heard, his panicked screams piercing the black. Beust soon slips from the beast's claws as it passes overhead. His cries are abruptly stunted as he plummets about sixty meters, violently striking the edge of the train's roof. The impact causes several windows to break, allowing the blizzard to find its way into the saloon car. Anyone witnessing Beust's brutal impact with the roof suffers 1/1D6 points SAN damage. His lifeless body slips away into the night.

Any investigators on the roof of the cars will see the dark mist begin to swirl around the train. Those inside will note that the blackness surrounding the car is criss-crossed by faint blue flashes of light, running through the darkness like pulsating veins.

About two-dozen yards behind the saloon car, a maelstrom begins to form, following the moving train and getting closer by the minute. It greedily consumes anything that passes near it, creating a ravenous wind that whips around the carriages. Adding to the already powerful blizzard, this harrowing wind makes it almost impossible to stand on the roof or on the rear platform of the saloon. The Byakhee and the Maelstrom should be incentive enough that the investigators remain inside the train. The Keeper can use one of the non-player characters to make the danger very clear.

Rachmanik strikes the piano ever more violently, and may lash out at anybody who tries to intervene. The Byakhee constantly attacks the roof of the car and will not shy away from attacking persons close to the windows either. The characters may finally catch clear glimpse of this creature.

It is unlikely that the Byakhee would pose much of a threat to heavily armed investigators, but weapons (if the investigators possessed any at all) will be locked in the luggage car (which sits between the two coaches and the engine). There are no firearms in the rest of the train; only a few kitchen implements such as knives and frying pans are available to the travellers to defend themselves. The Baron, at the discretion of the Keeper, may be armed with a small revolver, but he will not voluntarily give up the firearm to the investigators.

Any surviving non-player characters will need to be reassured or brought to safety if they are to survive the rest of this journey, and the investigators still need to figure out what is happening and why.

Dahm will begin to realize that it is he who is causing this chaos – he will try and deflect the blame, attempting to persuade the investigators that Rachmanik is behind the rapidly worsening situation. Rachmanik won't defend himself from such allegations; he can't – the stress has rendered the pianist unresponsive.

If the characters look at the pages that are scattered throughout the wagon (or perhaps flying around the wagon by this point) they may notice a number of details. First of all, the pages are stained in blood. It is obvious that it is Rachmanik's. One will notice that the blood has revealed hidden text beneath the scrawled musical notes. The pages are densely scribed with Latin, though it is nearly impossible to decipher.

Furthermore, several notes have been made on the pages in pencil, which were obviously written on the pages after they had come into contact with blood. These scruffy notes are a mix of almost half a dozen languages: German, French, Russian, Latin and Czech, as well as shorthand and meaningless scrawl.

These are the notes that Dahm has written around the edges of the page. The investigators may remember that Rachmanik could barely read or write. They may also spot that some of the places that Rachmanik has been cut would be very hard for the right-handed pianist to reach, such as his back and outer heel. Investigators may correctly guess that if he had been pacified with a strong sedative (much like they had witnessed Dahm prescribe to him earlier that evening), someone could easily inflict these wounds upon him.

Note: At the Keepers discretion, discovering the hidden notes may have a similar impact on any of the investigators as it did Dahm. Said character would become obsessed with the papers and the hidden knowledge therein, being stricken with a strong urge to take possession of the papers and decipher the text. An investigator affected in this way will not give up the papers easily.

If Dahm believes the investigators are becoming suspicious of him, he will quickly grab the bloodied papers if they are unaccompanied. He screams and stammers incoherently, telling of "the wisdom of the pages" that only he can read, and how important the knowledge contained within them is. If the characters have the papers and refuse to give them to him, he will take drastic action. He takes one of the passengers – possibly Miss Margarete Weissholt or any other seemingly harmless traveller – hostage. He holds a knife to their throat and demands the papers are returned to him. Dahm will not hesitate to harm or kill his hostage.

At the same time, the Byakhee should be able to catch the attention of some of the characters. It manages to punch a hole in the wagon's roof and grab one of the investigators or one of the surviving non-player characters. If this unfortunate victim is not helped, they are pulled from the train by the Byakhee and, like Beust, dropped from a great height. The body falls unerringly through the hole in the wagon roof and back into the car, striking the floor. This costs 1 / 1D6 SAN damage to onlookers. The game master should not hesitate to put pressure on players through Dahm's behaviour, the

ever-closer Maelstrom, and the barely defensible Byakhee attacks.

Preventing the End

The Byakhee has come to take Dahm and the papers to Carcosa. The music sheets and anything that is thrown off the train is devoured by the maelstrom. The vortex is now so strong that unrestrained items take flight and fly like bullets through the cars. Soon, the first boards in the rear of the saloon car come loose and fly into the approaching maw as it begins to consume the train. The back wall deforms slowly under great force. The maelstrom will consume more and more of the car. Snow, glass, luggage, and parts of the car are sucked greedily into the storm. The pull is soon so strong that it threatens to tug the investigators and passengers from the car. Pulling the emergency brake will only allow the maelstrom catch up more quickly.

Making contact with the locomotive using one of the available service telephones is impossible. Although the characters can hear the two train drivers at the other end, they do not seem to hear the investigators. The train drivers yell down the phone to "stop messing around!" The drivers view of the chaos is restricted by the enclosed locomotive cabin, luggage car and heavy snowstorm.

The sight of the maelstrom costs 1D2/1D8 points SAN.

As soon as Dahm has all the sheet music, he realizes that there is no way out. He will continue to threaten the hostage and frantically look for an escape route. He is unsurprisingly very afraid of the Byakhee. If the investigators manage to exchange a few sentences with Dahm, he may reveal the nature of the papers. He will describe how the notes had been given to them in France by one of Rachmanik's many fans – he does not remember a name. He insists that he always had Rachmanik's best interests in mind – he had confiscated the papers from him when the pianist had become obsessed with them – the music was so bad that it threatened to ruin his career!

From here his explanations become inaccurate and erratic. He enthuses about how he discovered the hidden writings by firelight. He tells of how he was fascinated by the secrets within these pages, the knowledge they might hold and how the promise of power took a hold of him; compelled him. He talks about the happenings on the train, the blood on the

notes, the incomprehensible delusion that has befallen him.

From here, he breaks down crying as he realizes what he's done and how he's harmed Rachmanik and possibly doomed the train. He maintains that everything he has done was the work of the papers; they filled him with an inhuman compulsion, forcing him to commit these deeds.

Dahm insists he can fix this. He's convinced that a solution can be found in the pages. He just needs more time... and blood. Face-to-face with Dahm's obvious insanity, it is unlikely that the investigators will go along with the plan. Unsurprisingly, if they do, nothing happens.

Characters observing the Byakhee will notice it pays special attention to collecting the papers. In fact the Byakhee will prioritise the papers over attacking the travellers. If one throws the papers out of the train, the Byakhee rushes to them and carries them into the Maelstrom. But once all of the pages have been cast from the train, the Byakhee does not disappear. Instead it focused its efforts on seizing Dahm. Dahm will not voluntarily surrender to the investigators (or the Byakhee) and may attempt to flee to a cabin or hide beneath one of the bolted-down tables.

There are a number of solutions at this point. The investigators may realise that the only way to end the horror is to use force: grab Dahm and throw him into the maelstrom. Another possibility might be to take refuge in the sleeping car, uncouple the parlor car, and let the car, and Dahm, be consumed by the maelstrom. In any case, as soon as the manuscript and Dahm have been cast into the Maelstrom, the vortex disappears, along with the Byakhee. As Dahm disappears into the vortex, it becomes eerily quiet for a moment. "It's so indescribably beautiful here!" the investigators hear Dahm cry before the sound of the snowstorm returns in full force.

Overview of The Night Concert

When the characters wake up for the second time in the night, it's almost 3 o'clock in the morning. This time the screaming does not sound annoying, but almost inhumanly shrill and panicked.

Arriving in the saloon car, they see the disfigured Rachmanik. Coming upon Dahm unconscious in his cabin, it seems as if the crazed pianist has bludgeoned his mentor and lost his mind. There is a loud thud as the unseen Byakhee lands on the

room. Beust goes to investigate and becomes the first victim. The creature carries him into the night before dropping him back onto the roof, smashing a window in the process, letting the blizzard rage inside the train. The Byakhee continues to attack the train (along with any imprudent travellers).

The characters will start to piece things together, seeing the notes on the sheet music that were revealed by Rachmanik's blood. They become suspicious of Dahm, who by now has shaken off his unconsciousness. His attempt to blame Rachmanik fails and he takes a hostage, attempting to retrieve the sheet music. All the while, the Byakhee's attacks are becoming increasingly difficult to fend off, and the Maelstrom engulfs the rear of the wagon along (and perhaps a non-player character).

Dahm attempts to flee, but the investigators apprehend him and the papers, perhaps throwing him into the maelstrom. With that, the maelstrom and the Byakhee disappears, and an eerie silence falls., "It is so indescribably beautiful here!" Dahm cries out as he disappears.

AFTERMATH

Finally the train grinds to a stop with squealing brakes. The saloon car is either destroyed or heavily damaged by the Maelstrom. When the attendants and train drivers are happy there is no further danger, the remainder of the train hobbles on to Berlin to complete its journey, only a little behind schedule.

Rachmanik, if he survived, will be committed to an asylum, where he will likely remain for many years. He attributes his condition to the death of his friend and mentor Albrecht Dahm, who died that night in a "serious train accident." Nobody will believe the story that the investigators and the survivors tell of that night. The train drivers insist that they saw nothing but strange smoke – the blizzard raged too hard for them to have witnessed what really happened to the cars behind them. The Reichsbahn, however, promises to conduct a thorough investigation that will reveal that technical defects, a fire, or perhaps even a crime were to blame for the destruction. In any case, the characters will have their tickets refunded.

APPENDIX STATISTICS

JAN MAREK RACHMANIK, 26, Deranged Pianist

STR 45 CON 45 SIZ 70 INT 65
POW 80 DEX 50 APP 65 EDU 65

SAN: 50

HP: 12

Damage bonus: -

Build: 0

Move: 7

Attacks:

Brawl: 50%, damage 1D3

Skills: Art/Craft (Piano) 95%, Dodge 20%, Music Theory 50%, Own Language (Czech) 65%, Other Language (German) 40%, Other Language (French) 40%

DR. ALBRECHT DAHM, 54, Tour Manager

STR 60 CON 75 SIZ 70 INT 80
POW 65 DEX 50 APP 60 EDU 85

SAN: 65

HP: 15

Damage bonus: +1D4

Build: +1

Move: 5

Attacks:

Brawl: 50%, damage 1D3+1D4

Improvised Club: 50%, damage 1D6+1D4

Skills: Dodge 20%, Own Language (German) 95%, Other Language (English) 70%,

Other Language (French) 40%, Other Language (Latin) 50%, Other Language (Czech) 80%,

Other Language (Russian) 80%, Persuasion 60%, Spot Hidden 60%, Stealth 50%.

FRIEDHELM BEUST, 51, Conductor

STR 70 CON 60 SIZ 70 INT 50
POW 55 DEX 70 APP 60 EDU 50

SAN: 55

HP: 13

Damage bonus: +1D4

Build: +1

Move: 6

Attacks:

Brawl: 50%, damage 1D3+1D4

Improvised Club: 50%, damage 1D6+1D4

Skills: Customer Service 50%, Dodge 35%, Own Language (German) 55%, Other Language (English) 30%, Other Language (French) 20%, Persuade 30%, Stealth 50%, Spot Hidden 60%

KARL HEINZ HEFFNER, 44, Conductor

STR 60 CON 65 SIZ 60 INT 60
POW 65 DEX 40 APP 80 EDU 55

SAN: 65

HP: 13

Damage bonus: +1D4

Build: +1

Move: 7

Attacks:

Brawl: 50%, damage 1D3+1D4

Improvised Club: 50%, damage 1D6+1D4

Skills: Customer Service 60%, Dodge 25%, Firearms (Handgun) 35%, Own Language (German) 65%, Other Language (English) 40%, Other Language (French) 40%, Spot Hidden 60%

KARL GEORG SCHLENK, 45, Baron von Richtenberg

STR 60 CON 70 SIZ 55 INT 70
POW 65 DEX 75 APP 60 EDU 60

SAN: 65

HP: 13

Damage bonus: -

Build: 0

Move: 7

Attacks:

Brawl: 85%, damage 1D3

Improvised Club: 60%, damage 1D6

Pocket Revolver (6 Shots): 60%, damage 1D6+3

Fencing: 60%, damage depending on weapon.

Skills: Dodge 50%, Library Use 60%, Own Language (German) 40%, Other Language (English) 40%, Other Language (French) 40%, Sports Trivia 45%, Spot Hidden 60%

MARGARETE WEISSHOLT, 28, Secretary

STR 45 CON 45 SIZ 65 INT 70
POW 80 DEX 55 APP 80 EDU 50

SAN: 80

HP: 11

Damage bonus: -

Build: 0

Move: 7

Attacks:

Brawl: 35%, damage 1D3

Improvised Club: 35%, damage 1D6

Skills: Accounting 60%, Dodge 20%, First Aid 25%, Own Language (German) 50%, Spot Hidden 35%

PROF. RICHARD GEORG HANDLER, 52,
Cardiologist

STR 50 CON 40 SIZ 80 INT 80
POW 65 DEX 50 APP 60 EDU 85

SAN: 65

HP: 12

Damage bonus: +1D4

Build: 1

Move: 5

Attacks:

Brawl: 50%, 1D3+1D4

Improvised Club: 50%, 1D6+1D4

Skills: Dodge 20%, First Aid 60%, Medicine 90%,
Own Language (German) 95%, Other Language
(English) 20%, Other Language (French) 80%,
Persuade 60%, Spot Hidden 60%

BYAKHEE, Star-steed

STR 90 CON 50 SIZ 90 INT 50
POW 50 DEX 70

HP: 14

Damage bonus: +1D6

Build: 2

Magic Points: 10

Move: 5/16 flying

Attacks:

Attacks per round: 2

Fighting attacks: The Byakhee attacks with its
claws or crashes into its victims.

Bite and hold (mnvr): On a successful bite attack,
the Byakhee remains attached to their victim and
drains their blood. Each round the Byakhee is
attached, including the first, the victim loses 3D10
of STR. The victim dies if their STR reaches 0. If
the victim makes a successful opposed STR roll
against the Byakhee, the victim can escape. Victims
who loose STR in this way may my regain 1d10+5
STR a day assuming they take the time to rest.

Fighting: 55%, damage 1D6+1D6

Bite and hold (mnvr): damage 1D6 + 3D10 STR
(blood) drain (single victim)

Armor: 2 points, fur and touch hide

Skills: Dodge 35%, Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%

Sanity Loss: 1/1D6 sanity points to see a Byakhee