

# Horror on the Orient Express

## Trail of Cthulhu Conversion notes

“Horror on the Orient Express” is one of the classic campaigns for Call of Cthulhu. In it investigators ride the luxurious and romantic Orient Express train on a terrifying journey from London to Constantinople and back. During their journey they will encounter sinister cultists, gruesome monsters, and a particularly malignant Mythos artefact. “Horror on the Orient Express” was published by Chaosium, Inc. as a box set in 1991. This document is a conversion of the London chapters of that campaign – “Dancers in an Evening Fog” and “The Doom Train” – to the GUMSHOE™ rules as used in Pelgrane Press’ Trail of Cthulhu. The original adventures were written by Geoff Gillan, L.N. Isinwyll, and Mark Morrison. This conversion was written by Jon Bunn.

For each clue I have listed one to three skills which seem most appropriate. But for many of these clues a wide range of skills may suffice. The Keeper should keep this in mind, and seek to reward player creativity when possible. The floating clues listed here are transmitted mostly through specific channels (such as newspapers), but it is more effective to allow any creative skill use to determine these facts, whether they derive from simple searches of newspapers or canvassing hotel desk clerks or Bobbies for the news of the day. This will prevent the scenario from lurching to a halt because the players do not think to mention reading the daily paper.

Very few scenes are required to propel the investigators onward to France and the rest of the campaign. As a result, most of the investigative meat in these two adventures consists of optional researches that will only be fully understood several adventures later or side-treks. While these excursions are optional, this conversion treats facts leading to them as core clues. The order of major scenes in these adventures is relatively linear and so the scenes will be described in the order they are likely to be encountered.

## Part I: London

### Dancers in an Evening Fog

#### The Challenger Lecture

(page 26)

- No core clues in this scene, but kindly keepers may grant 1 or 2 dedicated pool points concerning ghosts or dimensional gates to investigators interested in Dr. Smith’s lecture.
- **Credit Rating, Streetwise, or Anthropology 1-point spends** to notice Makryat staring. (Makryat is out of place in this social setting.)

#### Floating Clues 1

(pages 29, 31, 32)

- **Any Relevant Skill (Core Clue)** used in the day after the lecture will result in Player Handout #3 or facts from it. This information can also be gained by a **Simple Search** of any newspaper.
- **Any Relevant Skill (Evidence Collection or Library Use, if reading newspaper) 1-point spend** spots Player Handout #4 or hears facts from it.
- **Reassurance, Intimidation, Flattery, Cop Talk (Core Clue)** discovers the address of Makryat’s shop. **1-point spend** to hear of the identical telegrams. **2-point spend** for skinning details. Some sources are unlikely to know facts related to these spends. If so, they will direct investigators to someone who would know.
- **Most Interpersonal Skills** can find Makryat’s age and description, but this information is only available from those who knew the original or the embassy. **Beauracracy 1-point spend** at embassy learns Makryat’s records have disappeared.

#### The Message

(page 29)

- **Evidence Collection, Art History, Craft (Core Clue)** recalls Dr. Smith had a signet ring matching this seal.

## The Burned Man

(page 30)

- **Assess Honesty** infers Beddows is nervous and frightened, and because of this his honesty cannot be gauged.
- **2-point Stability test** for seeing “Dr. Smith.”

## Makryaf’s Shop

(page 32)

- **Evidence Collection** observes the shop contains no books except ledgers, no luggage except junk, and half-empty drawers.
- **Accounting** finds the Doom Train entry in the ledger. **Occult, History 1-point spend** identifies Alexis, **2-point spend** reveals how he died.

## The Doom Train

### Floating Clues

(pages 33 - 34)

- **Any Relevant Skill (Core Clue)** after The Burned Man will produce Player Handout #5b or facts from it. This information can also be obtained by a **Simple Search** of any newspapers.
- The following clues may be accessed after the players have encountered the toy train or Randolph Alexis.
- **History, Library Use** uncovers the history of the train.
- **Occult, Library Use** recalls or finds the identity of Randolph Alexis. **1-point spend** to recall or discover how he died (**Library Use** can accomplish this without a spend, but requires a library).

## The Bed-Sitting Room

(page 34)

- **Flattery (Core Clue)** obtains the landlady’s story and the whereabouts of the toy train.
- **Assess Honesty** infers the landlady is loose with the truth.
- **Simple Search** observes soot on furniture and ceiling, bubbles in the wallpaper.
- **Evidence Collection** spots parallel soot tracks in the carpet. **1-point spend** indicates the

distance between the lines is consistent with train tracks.

## The Local Police

(page 34)

- **Any Relevant Skill** receives the publicly available facts of the case. Investigators are referred to the Sergeant for more information.
- **Cop Talk (Core Clue)** causes the Sergeant gives his own opinion of the case. He also tells the location of the train. **1-point spend** to learn no human matter was found at the scene.

## Arthur Butters

(page 35)

- **Any Relevant Skill (Core Clue)** can get Arthur to tell his story and give he investigators permission to investigate the toy train. He can also provide some details on the history of the Liverpool train and the Orient Express.
- **Credit Rating** obtains permission to remove the train from Arthur’s home. Mentioning the Orient Express is sufficient to cause this as well. Some Keepers may want to close this option off if the players injudiciously used aggressive skills (such as Intimidation) toward Arthur, as he is a gentle soul.

## The Train Set

(page 36)

- **Evidence Collection, Simple Searches (Core Clue)** observes the vertical/horizontal pattern of the train track, arcane sigils underneath, and the handkerchief underneath.
- The Keeper may want to include some sort of incentive to encourage the investigators to continue running the toy train, whether this is some kind of distinctive smell or smoke (from the floor or walls) when the train is first run, or more simply an **Occult** use to observe that the train must have been activated in some way. The scenario includes no such thing, but this is to prevent the investigators from running the train once and then never doing it again.
- Activating the train costs **1 Stability** point. Also, a **4-point Stability** test for anyone who is sent to the capsule universe.
- Investigators automatically notice Stanley on board the train.

## On Board the Doom Train

(pages 37-39)

- Statistics for the Dead are located at the end of this document.

## The Second Carriage and the Plan

(page 38)

- **Forensics, Evidence Collection:** A.A's handkerchief is noticed in the first compartment. This may be worth a **2-point Stability** test.
- **3-point Stability test** for viewing the third compartment.
- **Occult, Craft:** Alexis' plan will not work because he has not accounted for the vertical nature of the train. This is arguably part of the "confrontation" of this scenario, and so Keepers wishing to encourage player ingenuity may wait a short while to see if the players put the clues together to produce this conclusion before suggesting such a roll. (If this is the case, subtly note the flatness of Alexis' meat-track on the floor.)
- After the error is realized and Alexis shows the investigators how to operate the meat-train, **Occult 2-point spend** to internalize the instructions, thus learning how to cast the **Doom Gate** spell (described at the end of this scenario). The Keeper may want to allow this only if a player independently thinks of trying to learn the spell.
- In the chaos of combat, train-pushers must succeed in **Difficulty 3 Athletics or Scuffling tests** to complete a circuit.
- Returning from the capsule universe costs **1 Stability** point.
- **Difficulty 4 Sense Trouble test** to hear the oncoming train whistle.
- **Difficulty 6 Athletics test** to successfully jump from the train. **-2 Damage** if successful, **-1 Damage** if not. **+2 Damage** if caught in the collision.

## Further London Research

(page 40)

- **Bureaucracy** gains entrance to the British Museum, with a delay of days to weeks. **1-point spend** to get in after only 24 hours.

- **Library Use** produces no direct information on the Sedefkar Simulacrum, but the scrolls are said to be located in the Topkapi Museum of Constantinople. **1-point spend** deduces that some information related to the Simulacrum may exist at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.
- **3-point Stability test** for viewing the skinned corpse.
- **Language (Modern Turkish)** is required to decipher the skin note.
- **Medicine, Forensics** determining the note is made of human skin.

## NPC Statistics

### Mehmet Makryat

Health 8, Athletics 6, Scuffling 5, Weapons 8, Firearms 6, Languages 2, Fleeing 6, Stability 15

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Weapon:** .38 revolver, 0 Damage; Skinning Knife, -1 Damage; Quoit (thrown ring, similar to chakram) 0 Damage

**Spells Known:** Animate Flesh Thing\*, Call Avatar of Skinless One\*, Contact Skinless One\*, Control Skin, Create Flesh Creeper\*, Fist of Yog-Sothoth, Melt Flesh\*, Skin Walker\*, Summon/Bind Fire Vampire, Transfer Body Part\*, Turn to Skin\*

*\* These spells do not appear in this scenario, and will be described in conversions for later "Horror on the Orient Express" chapters.*

### Randolph Alexis

Health 6, Weapons 7, Languages 2, Fleeing 7, Stability 8

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Weapon:** Rusty Knife, -1 Damage

**Spells Known:** Create Hyperspace Gate, Doom Gate, Dread Name of Azathoth, Elder Sign, Shrivelling, Voorish Sign

### The Dead

Health 7, Athletics 5, Scuffling 7, Weapons 2

**Hit Threshold:** 3

**Alertness Modifier:** -1

**Weapon:** Improvised Weapons, -1 Damage

**The Kiss:** Most often the Dead will attempt to administer the "kiss," which quite literally sucks the soul out of an unwilling victim. The Kiss is a scuffling roll with -1 Damage. Every round after a successful kiss does damage, the victim must take a Health test against a Difficulty equal to the damage

amount. If failed, the bite does double damage. Once the victim dies, he or she will rise the next round as a member of the Dead.

## Spells

### Control Skin

**Stability Test Difficulty:** 4

**Cost:** 2 Stability

**Time:** One minute of incantations.

This spell is as described on page 41, with the following notes:

- Casting this on an unwilling victim requires a Stability contest against the victim's current Stability
- Whole body control can be achieved by spending 12 stability
- If a point of stability rating is given up, the change will be permanent until the next casting

### Fist of Yog-Sothoth

**Stability Test Difficulty:** 4

**Cost:** 3 Stability or 6 Health

**Time:** Instantaneous

After a successful casting test, the caster must make a secondary Stability test against the victim's current Stability. If successful, the victim falls unconscious for at least one round – less forgiving keepers may wish to make this two rounds. After that the victim may make consciousness rolls against a difficulty equal to the number of successes by which the caster won the Stability contest. Whether or not the stability contest succeeds, the victim is thrown through the air away from the caster. The victim is thrown back one range category, except when the combatants are in the "Near" or "Long" ranges. In this case, the victim is thrown back but remains in the same range category.

### Summon/Bind Fire Vampire

**Stability Test Difficulty:** 4

**Cost:** 3 Stability

**Time:** 7 minutes of complicated ritual.

The incantations of this spell must be pronounced over a bonfire or other source of flame. Further, this spell may only be cast when the star Fomalhaut is visible in the night sky. In the northern hemisphere, this limits the casting of the spell to fall and early winter. When successfully completed, a fire vampire swoops down from the sky.

An unbound fire vampire resists with an Inertia of 8.