

# Midnight Express: the oncoming train (Part 1)



By BK & Rose

*A Web Enhancement for Episode 25 of the Midnight Express Podcast*

*When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.*

Corrie Ten Boom



The Midnight Express sourcebook provides six small modules for Wraith: the Oblivion, but more importantly it introduces a reliable transportation system for the underworld. Whilst many other relic trains exist in the Shadowlands, none have the same reputation for punctuality and security as the Midnight Express.

The imagery conjured by the ghost train is accessible to the modern mind, enhanced by the silent isolation of the late-night platform, or the crushing terror of rush-hour commuters. The moments of darkness as a train plunges into a tunnel can induce fear, whilst curiosity is aroused by tales of secret train lines and dis-used or unfinished stations.

The train represents a closed environment, but one that moves across different terrain. In the case of the Midnight Express, the outside terrain — the Tempest — is anathema to all but masters of Argos, and Spectres. The presence of an external hostile environment makes the security of one's carriage precious and anything that compromises its integrity is perceived as a dire threat indeed.

This article presents an additional station complete with NPCs and some plot hooks. Whilst not exhaustive by any means, these descriptions are provided to be used, re-used, and repurposed for your own stories of bleak oblivion. Part two will provide a guide to extra carriages for this august locomotive.

Further searching for urban exploration photos, abandoned stations, and local history associations will yield many new ideas. Wikipedia maintains lists of disused stations, whilst photo communities like Flickr are an excellent source of images to evoke your setting. Movies such as *Snowpiercer*, and *Murder on the Orient Express* will provide inspiration, as will other movies that evoke a closed environment, such as *Dark City*, *Maze Runner*, or even *Divergent*. The classic *Call of Cthulhu Orient Express* supplement is also worth reading by any Storyteller wanting to make the characters feel isolated and alone.

## Platforms 26 & 27, (Sydney, Australia)

*The ghosts of things that never hapened are worse than the ghosts of those that did*  
L.M. Montgomery

intended to service Bondi and Illawarra, Platforms 26 and 27 were constructed as part of Sydney's Central Station. The land was resumed by the State Government for the train station and whilst the infrastructure was built, no train has even entered or left the platform. The tunnels adjoining the platform only extend ten metres in each direction, originally intended to connect to the main lines, but never did so. The area is currently sealed for public safety.

In order to build the station, the Devonshire Street Cemetery was closed and over one thousand bodies exhumed and relocated. During the process, a high fence was erected to discourage vandalism, grave-robbing, and desecration. The current disused platforms sit directly over the former graves, and below the active station which ends with Platform 25. The designers intended for the tunnels to be on top of each other so that trains could pass each other safely.

The buildings of the station are still in remarkable condition as the location is only visited by historical societies and urban explorers. The structures include Station

Master's quarters (complete with a cosy fireplace), station offices, store-rooms, and holding cells complete with heavy iron shackles chained to the stone walls.

In 1916, the station was the scene of a short gun battle as nearby soldiers, disgruntled with the conditions of the camps, commandeered local trains in protest. They were engaged in a gun fight with military police and the bullet holes and chipped masonry are still visible today. The incident resolved with only one rioting soldier shot dead, though several were reported injured.

Nowadays, the station remains a curiosity, although a secret society of urban explorers known only as the *Cave Clan* are known to frequent the area. The group have been following rumours of old storm drains that are only accessible at low tide and give access to large portions of the city from underground. These storm drains were the result of early city builders simply enclosing the natural creeks that had been turned into sewers; to them, the structure was already mostly present, the creeks emptied into the ocean, and citizens were already using the channels for waste removal.

The platforms have been consistent in ghostly phenomenon with the sound of cheerful crowd conversation and the sounds of children playing reported throughout the years.

In the Shadowlands, such a location has many merits for the Hierarchy. As a key station for the Midnight Express, Platform Twenty-Six-Seven (as it is known locally) receives the locomotive. The local Marshal (see below) is appointed by the Emerald Legion, and the Seat of Thorns jealously administers the station. Sydney and Melbourne are rich in souls and have always been the centre of Hierarchy power struggles in Australia. Whilst violent death is low nationally (less than 300 deaths per year nationally, including car accidents), these are major population centres, home to 4.2m and 4.6m souls each. As such, the two cities account for over one-third of the national population.

The resonance of the station is enough to have caused the entire structure to exist in the Shadowlands, and the Hierarchy Legions have found a use for it all (including the cells). The Midnight Express delivers goods, services, and Restless to the Sydney Necropolis safely and efficiently, so there has never been a need to explore alternative options. Even Stygia accepts the Express, so the Kingdom of Clay (Karta) is no exception. Karta is however in more desperate need than Stygia as the Tempest surrounding this Dark Kingdom is particularly violent. The few post-European settlement Necropoli are in a tenuous situation, very much dependant on reliable transport to mitigate the 'tyranny of distance'.

The current representatives of the Hierarchy on Platform Twenty-Six-Seven are not here by choice. Every one of the Legionnaires (including the Marshal) is here as penance for some sin, and the predictable results of grouping law-benders and breakers are already showing.

### Characters

*Maybe all the people who who say ghosts don't exist are just afraid to admit that they do*  
Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*

### Abigail.

Abigail is the station Marshal and holds the territory for the Hierarchy, at least in theory. She has used her rank to make this an influential location in New South Wales, and

cultivates a certain sense of entitlement in both her daily dealings and those of her subordinates. In Abigail's mind, the exemplary work undertaken in hostile conditions is not adequately reflected in her remuneration; her 'side jobs' provide a necessary revenue stream for those Restless permanently posted in Sydney. As such, her subordinates are able to 'keep up appearances' when outsiders inspect the station, but spend the rest of their time engaged in clandestine activities.

**Image:** Abigail was claimed when her car was forced off the road and into a frozen river. She had allowed an unlicensed friend to drive the last stretch home from a holiday and fell asleep in the passengers' seat. The shock of cold awoke her long enough to be aware of drowning. Both Abigail and her friend Samantha were Reaped and joined the Hierarchy, but Abigail was deeply resentful of her abbreviated life. As she rose through the ranks, she conspired with her Shadow to arrest Samantha for Heretic activity. When Samantha was consigned to the forge, Abigail bribed the Artificer to soulforge her former friend into a sword; the same sword that hangs at her side to this day. Abigail's skin retains the mark of her passing; it takes a slightly black-blue tinge and perceptive Restless have seen a hazy fog-like aura around her. Her skin is slightly cool to the touch, and whilst some know her as 'Ice Queen' none would dare speak it aloud in her presence.

**Roleplaying hints:** The Marshall of Platform 25 is generally calm and genial, greeting newcomers with a smile and following orders with persistence and success. Those closest to her know that this facade quickly melts when times are bad; she has no hesitation to throw traitors and false friends to the barghests. This duplicity breeds a certain type of sycophant in her cohort as those joining Platform 25 see it as a lucrative gamble.

### Foul 'arry

Accidental death is sometimes a source of humour in the Shadowlands although the poor wretch usually rises above it all. Foul 'arry is the exception to the rule. A leg-breaker and protection racket enforcer in the early years of Sydney, he was killed when a madame dropped a full chamber pot on his head from a second-storey window rather than capitulate to organised crime. The stench of the murder weapon followed him across the Shroud and now Harry's death mark makes him memorable (and foul). Posing as a ne'er-to-do-well at the Station, Harry spends his time watching over the homeless Quick who bunk here, and Reaping the souls of those who cross over. Abigail uses him



<sup>1</sup>I'm serious, this is what the group is called. Proof that you don't need fiction when the real world is weird enough.

as a distraction when Hierarchy officials visit, or when she needs to engage in more noticeable criminal activity. The offensive stench of this wraith hides his true nature; Harry is actually a servant of the Emerald Lord. He watches Abigail's shipments and activities, as well as any troop movements through the area by other Legions. Whilst Foul 'arry is happy reporting to his maters, he's under no illusions of his fate should Abigail catch him out.

**Image:** Foul 'arry wears a faded suit that was fashionable in the early 1800's and an overcoat that has seen better nights. His long stringy hair was greasy in life, and is now clotted with other organic material from his time of death. He has a sharp face that was giving way to soft flab and wrinkles. The experience of 'arry is completed by the stench of sewerage that wafts from him. When he wears his battered relic top hat, the smell seems to be contained for a short while, only to be released when the hat is removed.

**Roleplaying hints:** Foul 'arry often grunts rather than answer questions and appears confused or slightly angry. Oboli brings out a viciously intelligent glint in his eye and a far more educated conversation.

### Teeth

Reaped into the Iron Legions, the real name of this Restless has been forgotten. Rather, he's known for his soul-forged false teeth which he acquired some time ago as he didn't 'feel right' without them. A creature of habit, Teeth is the Station Quarter Master and is well-known as a master forager and deal-maker. He also manages the Barghest kennels, which led to one witty Restless making a connection between 'teeth' and 'canines'. The wit was soon forgotten when Teeth allowed his charges to hunt the unfortunate through the train tunnels. Teeth is always interested in a dodgy deal, or 'get rich quick' scheme and still refers to some of his merchandise as having 'fallen off the back of a truck'. He crossed over after his daughter-in-law convinced her husband to ship Teeth off to a nursing home to acquire his house in inner-city Sydney during the 1980's. The couple have since made their fortune renting the real estate, whilst Teeth succumbed to frailty. Perhaps his questionable dealings in the Shadowlands are an attempt to capture the fortune cheated from him in life.

**Image:** Rake-thin and scowling, Teeth always seems to be chewing on something; his jaw working angrily. Maybe he's reliving his final years, nourished by disappointment and anger, maybe it's simply his method of focusing his mind; maybe it's a little of both. His uniform is always in fine condition, and there is usually an extra touch, such as shiny buttons, or a stylish flourish that betrays his love of finer things.

**Roleplaying hints:** He has an annoying habit of dislodging his false teeth and moving them round in his mouth when truly deep thought is occurring. When he speaks, it is with clipped, direct statements. One usually has the impression when leaving Teeth that he thinks they aren't worth noticing, and unless they are part of his schemes that's entirely true.

### Other dramatis personae

**Blue** is a red-headed street urchin who heads a gang of deceased street kids after he was shivved by a teenager in a fight over a few blankets. He sports a faded jacket with a large 'Salvos' badge and has a soft-spot for child wraiths.



**Sophie** was a barista at a trendy inner-city cafe who used the wage to pay for a university education in international politics. Originally a 'country girl' from near Lismore, she moved to the big city only to be killed in a home invasion at the end of her first semester.

**Depressed Dave** is a second-generation Greek who was convinced by peers in primary school to change his name to something more 'Australian' to fit in. Dave was a stock-market financier who was left with nothing after his partners framed him for embezzlement. Rather than face the Courts, he threw himself from the company building.

**Tamara** had just finished high school and had an electrician's ('sparkie's') apprenticeship lined up before she went to Schoolies on the Gold Coast. Several drinks and a mis-step on a high-rise balcony on Cavell Street meant that she never returned home alive. Tamara has only recently made her way back to Sydney and is looking for her family.

### Adventure Seeds

Anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and a strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories.

Paul Theroux

The most obvious adventure seed is illicit contraband. Abigail will take action to ensure that she is suitably recompensed for this posting (sure that this is temporary) and Teeth will help her with any scheme that further his material ambitions. Foul 'arry will watch and report as ordered and try not to get involved unless absolutely necessary. Characters could become embroiled in this trade, seeing a way to garner Hierarchy favour and make a few oboli. This story could focus on the decisions and justifications for actions that are purely for selfish gain (and the responses of their respective Shadows).

Conversely, the Circle could be positioned in an adversarial role and contact (or be contacted by) Foul 'arry as part of intelligence gathering. They will be ordered to keep a low profile, but if some of the activity horrifies the characters, they are left with a decision to reveal their purpose or be bystanders to morally repugnant acts. England saw Australia as a dumping ground for undesirables only two centuries ago; this is a very short time as wraiths reckon it.

If the characters are interested in Skinlands stories, the Cave Clan urban explorers possess huge potential. Storytellers might decide that they are a group of extreme explorers who initiate their members with death-defying exploration into flooding pipes, or over dizzying heights, or they could have more clandestine supernatural ties. A

recently deceased soul might have died in an initiation ritual and possess a secret that needs to cross the Shroud; or the founders of the Cave Clan might be deliberately killing initiates so that they can explore the Shadowlands (and have ways of controlling or compelling post-mortem).

For internal conflicts, Storytellers will have already questioned the power of the Shadows of those in control of Twenty-Six-Seven. If Abigail and Teeth were to succumb to their baser natures, or become Spectres, the security of the Necropolis could be severely compromised.

Lastly, there is the Devonshire Street Cemetery. It is likely that there is still a strong relic trade from the exploration of the exhumed site (perhaps in a lower level of the station that only a Doomslayer would dare tread), or perhaps the lowest levels house a small hive of Spectres who are subtly influencing the desires of Hierarchy officials and feeding their Shadows with avaricious dreams...

#### List of images (in order of appearance)

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