

A person wearing a military-style helmet and uniform is shown in profile, looking down at a small, textured object held in their hands. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE TEMPLE  
OR,  
LEBENSRAUM

*An Hypoxial Horror Story in Two Acts*  
By Nat Cassidy

Inspired by the short story by H.P. Lovecraft

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The car is on fire, and there's no driver at the wheel  
And the sewers are all muddied with a thousand lonely suicides  
And a dark wind blows  
- Godspeed You! Black Emperor

*Kleine opfer müssen gebracht werden!*  
- Otto Lilienthal

## **Setting**

We are in the control room of submarine—to be more specific, a World War II Nazi U-Boat. It is May 1943, the very month when Germany lost its advantage in the Atlantic, never to be regained again. The interior is in ruins, papers scattered about, steam, disarray, etc. NOTE: this can be done with just lights, a few props, and a very close audience (preferably, I'd say, in a tennis-court-style arrangement for maximum claustrophobic effect) if the budget doesn't permit a full submarine set.

## **A Note on the Italicized "Ghost" Scenes**

After much discussion and experimentation in the rehearsal room, it was discovered that the most effective way to perform these scenes (once the idea of telling a joke is mentioned/discovered) is with a heightened, jovial, almost vaudevillian energy. If the cyclical nature of the story is to be truly exploited (and thus be truly horrifying), a) it should be regarded that this is far from the first time these ghosts have performed this "joke" (indeed, I like to think of the action of the play being contemporaneous to the production) and b) Heinrich's own outlook on life, as well as his theatrical, goofy nature, has infected them like a virus. They are all, essentially, now little Heinrichs, and the grimness of their fates is highly amusing to them. All of this goes to basically say, commit to it almost being two distinct plays, with the italicized scenes being high energy and happiness and rapport, until the second act, when the weight of the events begin to be felt by the characters.

## **Characters**

Oberführer Karl Heinrich – a propagandist  
Kommandant Tod Klenze – a captain  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wachoffizier Sigmund Zinner – a student  
3<sup>rd</sup> Wachoffizier Erich Trauke – a sympathizer  
Funkhauptgefreiter Ahrendt – a Russian  
Meteorologe Bohm – an American  
Bootsmann Albrecht Muller – a veteran  
Ingenieur Tom Raab – a claustrophobe

The Stowaway – a mystery

*The Temple, or, Lebensraum* received its world premiere at the Brick Theatre in Brooklyn, NY, as part of the Brick Resident Artist Program in February 2015. It was produced by Tin Drum Productions and MozzleStead Productions; directed by Nat Cassidy; stage managed by Sarah Lahue; set designed by Sandy Yaklin; sound designed by Jeanne Travis; lighting designed by Morgan Zipf-Meister; costumes designed by Ben Philipp; gore designed by Stephanie Cox-Williams; technical direction by Ashanti Ziths; and fight choreography by John D. Gardner; with the following cast:

Oberführer Karl Heinrich: Matthew Trumbull  
Kommandant Tod Klenze: Arthur Aulisi  
2nd Wachoffizier Sigmund Zinner: Tristan Colton  
3rd Wachoffizier Erich Trauke: Zac Hoogendyk  
Funkhauptgefreiter Ahrendt: Ridley Parson  
Meteorologe Bohm: John D. Gardner  
Bootsmann Albrecht Muller: John Blaylock  
Ingenieur Tom Raab: Eric Gilde  
The Stowaway: Adriana Jones

*"[A] genuinely magnificent piece of theater. Watching a talented artist like Cassidy deconstruct and then reconstruct the source code of Lovecraft's story and style is a helluva thing to see. ... Like the characters in the play, you are completely submerged in the events of the play, and when THE TEMPLE OR LEBENSRAUM wants to it strikes its audience like a perfectly aimed torpedo.... [M]onstrously entertaining."* - Mitch Montgomery, Surreal Time Press

*"[B]rilliantly enforces the claustrophobia. ... [T]he play ends on a masterful note of narrative suspension you should witness for yourself, it's clear, and inescapable, and maybe even reassuring, that there's always a longer way down."* - Adam McGovern, Fanchild

*"Tense, literally breathtaking ... THE TEMPLE OR LEBENSRAUM will bring you on a terrifying, liberating adventure. ... Most amazing ... scares everyone to death ... Effortlessly universal in the way ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT tries to be ... The Lovecraftian influence comes at certain times, definitely making me vow never to join the navy, but THE TEMPLE is a mostly non-supernatural drama that will appeal to anyone."* - Ed Malin, NY Theater Now

*"Nat Cassidy's adaptation of Lovecraft's THE TEMPLE is such a delight. Well, as much of a delight as anything involving mutilation, suffocation, cannibalism, Nazis and the elder gods can be. Cassidy is a strong storyteller; one who fully appreciates just how powerful the combination of excellent actors, fraught situations, and an audience's imagination can be. ... [O]ne of my favorite moments of the play was during a scene where the men were running out of air. The actors were arranged on the floor trying to breathe. No dialogue. Just breathing. The audience was rapt the entire time."* - Byrne Harrison, Stagebuzz

*"Disturbing ... Fascinating ... I admired this greatly."* - Eva Heinemann, Hi Drama

*"A horrorshow of the claustrophobic lives of German submariners and the evil that consumes them ... [A] living, breathing, immersive spectacle. ... Make[s] the horror of the sea, of WWII, and of the Lovecraftian-influenced Gnostic psychodrama all too real. ... [Heinrich is] one of the most chilling displays of inhumanity that I've ever seen onstage. He is a true devil, in the most Christian sense of the word, all charm and bonhomie, doing nothing more than opening the door to horrors that the regular men of the ship seem all-to-easily able to commit."* - Michael Niederman, New York Theater Review

*"[M]emorable, engaging and worth our time and attention."* - Ekaterina Lalo, Reviewfix

**ACT ONE**  
**DARKNESS**

*[We hold in darkness and silence for a few moments, then we begin to hear the drone from the beginning of Wagner's Das Rheingold. It morphs into the sounds of crushing pressure outside the hull. It starts small but gets louder and louder—until it's practically unbearable. When it seems like it can't possibly get any worse, it abruptly cuts out and all the lights go red.]*

*[Onstage, lying in the same positions as they will wind up in the final scene, are TRAUKE, ZINNER, MULLER, RAAB, BOHM, and AHRENDT. As they speak, the light flickers, the power dying. After a moment, TRAUKE bolts awake with a gasp.]*

*TRAUKE*  
*Gott!*

*ZINNER*  
*Shhh*

*TRAUKE*  
*Bin ich wach?*

*AHRENDT*  
*Jah*

*RAAB*  
*Shhh*

*TRAUKE*  
*Ich hatte den traum wieder*

*MULLER*  
*Wir wissen*

*TRAUKE*  
*Der traum, I had der traum again. I had*

*BOHM*  
*We know*

*ZINNER*  
*Just a dream.*

*RAAB*  
*It's horrible, we know.*

AHRENDT  
*Just a dream*

TRAUKE  
*I never want to have that dream again*

BOHM  
*It's over now. (Beat.)*  
*Heyyyy. This shit is depressing, someone tell him a joke*

MULLER  
*A joke?*

RAAB  
*Yeah, that sounds nice*

TRAUKE *(a joke)*  
*"Es war einmal, die Welt im Krieg!"*

AHRENDT  
*That's not a joke*

MULLER  
*Sure it is*

BOHM  
*Naw, you gotta start it like a joke starts.*  
*Knock knock*

ALL  
*Who's there*

BOHM *("Report!")*  
*Who's there!*

ALL  
*The ship responds*

*[The mood distinctly changes – they begin to become energetic, jovial, excited to be sharing something with each other and working as a team. Each man rises and points to the person he's describing. There is the briefest sense that they are rediscovering in the moment.]*

ZINNER  
*That's Third Wachoffizer Trauke.*

*TRAUKE*

*29 years old, from Frankfurt. He's Engineer Raab.*

*RAAB*

*I'm 25. From Leipzig. That's Second Wachoffizer Zinner. From Danzig.*

*ZINNER*

*Western Danzig. 28. He's Boatswain Muller. From Zeesen. 60 ... 8 years old?*

*MULLER*

*Fifty-five, asshole, I'm not that old*

*AHRENDT*

*Be nice.*

*BOHM*

*Just a joke*

*MULLER (re BOHM and AHRENDT)*

*You two we don't know as well.*

*RAAB*

*New recruits.*

*ZINNER*

*Been a lot of those these days.*

*TRAUKE*

*The tide is turning.*

*AHRENDT*

*I am funkhauptgefreiter Ahrendt. From Stuttgart.*

*BOHM (an arm around AHRENDT)*

*Meteorologe Bohm. Also from Stuttgart.*

*AHRENDT*

*Oh yeah?*

*BOHM*

*Funny, right?*

*MULLER*

*I hope that's not the joke.*

*BOHM*

*No, no, just warming up*

*[They begin to rotate around the space as they talk to each other, rediscovering it.]*

*ZINNER*

*Where are we, Raab?*

*RAAB*

*We're in the control room of a U-Boat. It's 1943.*

*ALL (smiling)*

*Ohhhhh*

*RAAB*

*You ready for the joke?*

*ALL*

*The ship responds.*

*RAAB*

*Just needs some set up. (They all get into position.)*

*Knock knock:*

*[We hear the sound of a torpedo hitting a ship outside.]*

*RAAB*

*So. A monster walks onto a U-Boat and*



## SCENE ONE

*[Lights suddenly shift to normal, “healthy” lighting. Oberfuhrer HEINRICH runs in from the side ZINNER and TRAUKE have clustered in and vomits onto the floor. They’ve all just come in from outside. HEINRICH is a bespectacled, mild-mannered man. He’s wearing a black poncho and rainhat. ZINNER and TRAUKE look at him, disgusted. YET ANOTHER NOTE: all characters not in the scenes being played out watch impassively, occasionally commenting as directed. HEINRICH finishes vomiting.]*

HEINRICH (*spitting*)

Bluh

ZINNER

Couldn’t have done that //overboard?

*[HEINRICH vomits again.]*

HEINRICH

Hoo. (*Spits.*) Sorry. I don’t know how you fellas—hoo.

TRAUKE

You gonna be okay?

HEINRICH

Yeah. Yeah. Y—urk.

ZINNER

Seas aren’t even that bad today.

HEINRICH (*to himself*)

It wasn’t that. It

God, that thing just (*exploded*)

They didn’t have a chance, did they?

TRAUKE

What’s that?

HEINRICH

That, that merchant ship, we just

ZINNER

Yeah. That’s what we do.

HEINRICH

Never seen anything like it.

Um. How long until, uh, she, goes under? All the way?

TRAUKE

We hit her towards the stern, so

ZINNER

Not long.

[ZINNER tosses him a rag. HEINRICH starts to clean up.]

HEINRICH

I bet that footage will look great, though. Really inspiring for the folks back home. Go team! (*He waves the rag, splashing some vomit.*) Oops. Do you think everyone'll make it?

ZINNER

Back home?

HEINRICH

The ship.

ZINNER

Who cares?

HEINRICH

Right.

Even so, uh, can you, would you mind making sure with Herr Hauptmann they're getting all the, uh, lifeboats *in* the cameras? Photos and film?

ZINNER

Huh? You want me to (*pointing up*)

HEINRICH

If you wouldn't mind? Power *and* mercy, ya know! Don't want another Belgium on our hands, right? Hah!

ZINNER

Yeah.

[ZINNER goes to leave.]

HEINRICH

Uh. Heil Hitler?

[ZINNER stops, stares at HEINRICH, then at TRAUKE. ZINNER snaps a military salute curtly and leaves. Pause. HEINRICH looks at TRAUKE.]

HEINRICH  
He's not a fan.

[*He starts to mop up his vomit again.*]

TRAUKE  
You need anything? Whiskey, or  
I think Muller's wife packed him with strudel

HEINRICH  
Is it possible to get some water?

TRAUKE  
Uh. No. Sorry, we try to conserve that whenever we

HEINRICH  
No water?  
Ha! Ha! Hahahaha.

TRAUKE  
Yeah

HEINRICH  
No w—I'm on a submarine and!  
Ha! The world's a funny place, isn't it? No soap. Radio.

TRAUKE  
What?

HEINRICH (*answering the offer*)  
No, no, no, I'm, I'm fine. I'm just, that was a lot! Hahah, you know my wife used to call me her Little Daisy sometimes. Think I might be a little too sensitive for, uh, all this. Oh well. (*He has removed his poncho to reveal an immaculate black Nazi SS uniform.*)  
I'm sure your friend up there will come up with some better nicknames for me. Remind me his name again, Zimmer?

TRAUKE  
Zinner.  
And, he's, he's not a //bad guy

HEINRICH  
No, no, I get it. Having me here, it's  
Crummy. Is that the word?

TRAUKE  
Yeah. But it's not just //you

HEINRICH

I get it, believe me.

TRAUKE

How much longer you with us, again?

HEINRICH (*he doesn't know*)

Another day or so, I guess? Then I'm picked back up and, Deutschland, Deutschland.

TRAUKE

I'm sure everyone'll thaw out before then. It's just ... Look, we got 55 full-grown men in here. It's hot. It's muggy. Our papers are mush, everything's covered in slime. It smells. We smell. We've got one john between us all—it's a lot of shit to deal with. Literally. And, I mean, you flush it wrong, the whole boat sinks and everyone dies. So, when someone comes on and starts adding to our, our shit ... Just, please don't take it personally—you seem like a nice guy and I think some of the men are just ... tense.

HEINRICH

Gotcha.

TRAUKE

I just, I don't want you to

HEINRICH

Say anything bad to my superiors.

TRAUKE (*that's not what he was going to say*)

Well

HEINRICH

Oh, they can overreact a bit, can't they? I appreciate your, uh, candor, Herr Trauke. Um. Hey, do you mind if, while we're down here. The other part of my, my assignment, besides the pictures? Um. (*He pulls out a notebook and pencil.*) It's stupid. "Do you like being a member of the elite U-Boat force?"

TRAUKE

Do I like it?

HEINRICH

I know, it's absurd. "What's your favorite part of serving in the Kriegsmarine?"

TRAUKE

Uh

HEINRICH

It's okay. I'm only interested in the truth. "What do you think compels you to follow orders even though"

**BOHM**

*Suddenly:*

*[The other men onstage start making machine gun noises. First they're scattered, one man at a time, going "Bang! Bangbangbang!" Then they all join in.]*

**HEINRICH**

Oh, God, are we under attack?

**TRAUKE**

No. That sounds like our //gun—

*ZINNER (from where he's sitting)*

*It was Kommandant Klenze. We watched him grab the deck gun and fire the first shots, screaming.*

*MULLER*

*Soon the rest of the men were clamoring to take over.*

*ZINNER*

*Opening fire on the English lifeboats.*

*RAAB*

*It was amazing.*

*BOHM*

*Even from far away.*

*AHRENDT*

*The plastic rippling and exploding, the water puckering.*

*ZINNER*

*I was somewhat giddy when I came down and told him—*

**HEINRICH**

What?! No, no, no, no—!

*[The bangs increase. HEINRICH runs out. Lights flicker back to red.]*

## GHOST INTERVAL II

*TRAUKE*

*The peace and quiet. That's my favorite part of being in the Kriegsmarine.*

*MULLER*

*Now I know you're joking*

*BOHM*

*Muller, you next, you know how it goes next.*

*MULLER*

*I do?*

*RAAB*

*Come on. You were there.*

*AHRENDT*

*With the hand*

*MULLER*

*Oh. Right.*

*ZINNER*

*We set a course and sail away*

*ALL*

*The ship responds*

## SCENE TWO

KLENZE (*offstage*)

EXEC, SET COURSE AND EVERYBODY GET THE FUCK OUT I NEED //FIVE FUCKING MINUTES!

MULLER

*And I just thought he'd need something to drink, to calm him down, you know? I know what he gets like when he's mad.*

*[Lights back to normal. KLENZE enters and begins pacing ferally in the control room. He's Aryan, through and through. After a moment, MULLER stands reluctantly and enters the scene. He hands KLENZE a tin cup full of whiskey. KLENZE drinks from it, then throws the cup at the wall. MULLER, sensing the situation, retrieves the cup, turns to leave—and there's HEINRICH.]*

HEINRICH

Hi. Boatswain Muller, right?

MULLER

Sir.

HEINRICH (*"I'm learning names!"*)

Yay!

Uh, would you mind—?

KLENZE

No. Stay, Muller.

MULLER (*"I'll just leave."*)

Sir.

KLENZE

Don't move a fucking muscle. I gotta feeling Herr Heinrich here's going to have a really fucking fascinating reason for doing what he just did, and if it makes any goddamn sense it'll be a fucking miracle. It ain't a miracle without a witness, Muller. (*Directly to HEINRICH.*) Come on now!

HEINRICH (*calmly*)

I wish you wouldn't start out so defensively—

KLENZE

WHAT THE FUCK MAKES YOU THINK YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PULL ME OFF MY FUCKING DECK GUN YOU FUCKING PIECE OF FUCKING FUCK?! I can put up with carting you around like a fucking child while you take fucking pictures

and get in my way, but in case word hasn't reached you in your fucking office behind your fucking desk, we're in the middle of a fucking war!!

HEINRICH

Kommandant, I understand but they were// just lifeboats and

[*KLENZE grabs him.*]

KLENZE

I ought to beat your fucking face in right here!

HEINRICH (*wincing*)

Please don't

[*KLENZE lets him go with a roar. Tries to calm himself.*]

KLENZE (*under his breath*)

Anyone else, I'dve had you shot for //that

HEINRICH

Kommandant Klenze.

[*KLENZE stops, looks at him.*]

HEINRICH (*genuinely*)

I'm, I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry. (*HEINRICH drops to his knees and clasps his hands over his head, dramatically.*) I am sorry, sorry, sorry. Sorry. Sorry. I am so sorry. Will you accept my apology?

KLENZE

You—

[*Flustered, he starts to pace again.*]

KLENZE

I don't know what I'm supposed to do with that, Heinrich. // I, I—You come on to my boat—my boat, Heinrich—

HEINRICH

(*kindly; overlapping*)

Whatever you feel you need to

Well, it's not your boat, it is Germany's boat. You're just a Kommandant—

KLENZE

Muller. Plug your ears.



MULLER  
I can leave

KLENZE  
MULLER

[*MULLER starts to put his finger in his ears.*]

KLENZE  
Sing. I don't want you hearing this.

[*MULLER plugs his ears and begins to sing a German song. KLENZE approaches HEINRICH.*]

KLENZE  
We don't got a lot of time. And every second I waste on you is I don't know why someone decided it was a good idea to saddle us with you right now, I don't know why a lotta things lately, but *just a lifeboat*? You have no idea how lucky we were to fucking find that merchant ship. You don't have any goddamn idea what it's been like the past few weeks. The messages I have in this pocket? If you had *any* idea

HEINRICH  
Right! But I'm here to learn, //Kommandant

KLENZE  
All you gotta learn is to fucking stay out of my way and do what I say. That's the only way, Heinrich. Chain of command. Order. You should appreciate that. You and your jackboots.

HEINRICH  
Oh! Oh, yes! I do appreciate that, and let me ask you: why?

KLENZE (*incredulously*)  
What?

HEINRICH (*pulling out his notebook*)  
No, "why?" Why should I listen to you? //Or anybody? Why do you think man thinks structure is what's keeping the chaos at bay, when

KLENZE  
To fucking stay alive?? What?! We're not talking fucking philosophy, Heinrich! Muller, shut up! (*He pulls MULLER's fingers out of his ears.*) Grab Exec and tell //him to

HEINRICH  
I'm sorry, wait, wait, we're just getting to something interesting—

[HEINRICH grabs KLENZE, who makes as if to punch him but stops.]

KLENZE

Hey. You don't grab me. You don't touch me. You're not really here, understand?  
You're a temporary problem, you're a fucking hemorrhoid

HEINRICH

I hope you're not holding back because of my position, // please, Kommandant

KLENZE

I am absolutely holding back, Heinrich.

HEINRICH

I'm a soldier, same as you.

KLENZE

You're a fucking politician!

HEINRICH

Hey, upon what front do you think these wars are fought the hardest?

MULLER

Sir, what did you want //me to do?

KLENZE

How far would you follow me, Muller?

MULLER

To the ends of the earth, sir.

KLENZE

*Why?*

MULLER (*at a loss*)

Because you, you keep us //safe

KLENZE

Do you love me, Muller?

MULLER

Yes, sir!

KLENZE

Make a fucking fist!

[MULLER does.]

KLENZE

This? This is how you win a war. Only way to make a fist is if the fingers listen to the hand. Then the hand's gotta listen to the arm if you wanna throw a punch. (*He grabs MULLER's fist.*) This is us. My ship, my mission. Muller, punch me. Come on. In the face, Muller. (*MULLER hesitates.*) DO YOU LOVE ME, MULLER?

[*MULLER punches him in the face.*]

KLENZE (*to HEINRICH*)

“WHY??” CUZ THE ARM FUCKING SAID SO

Now you make a fist, Heinrich. Come on, I want to see if you've got this.

[*HEINRICH makes a fist.*]

KLENZE

Yeah, there you go. Feel that?

HEINRICH

Yes.

KLENZE

Good! Stick a finger out. We're just talking philosophy, Heinrich.

[*HEINRICH sticks a finger out.*]

KLENZE

Not a very good fist now, is it? Not gonna do much damage.

[*KLENZE grabs HEINRICH's finger.*]

KLENZE

And now you're vulnerable. You're in the middle of the ocean and //someone isn't obeying orders.

HEINRICH

I mean, I understand the point you're making, Kommandant, but consider the larger question here, the //whyyyahhhhhhhh

[*KLENZE snaps HEINRICH's finger. HEINRICH screams.*]

KLENZE

You don't want me to hold back? Okay. This whole fucking war, you fucking act like you wanna win it and then you. Keep. Fucking.

*[KLENZE snaps another one of HEINRICH's fingers. HEINRICH screams, and begins laughing.]*

KLENZE

Yeah, it's fun! *(He breaks another finger. HEINRICH scream/laughs. He breaks the remaining fingers throughout.)* Yeah! And maybe I'll regret saying this, and maybe it's because I haven't slept in six days, but I'm fucking sick of watching so many good fists breaking 'cause of fucking yous, fucking earlobes or, or, collarbones, or pointless fucking Make a fist now! Come on! THERE'S YOUR WHY

*[KLENZE lets go of HEINRICH. HEINRICH faints dead away. KLENZE realizes what he's just done.]*

MULLER

Sir

KLENZE

... fuck me ...

TRAUKE

*Then, from the watch*

ZINNER, RAAB, BOHM, AHRENDT

*ALARRRRRRRRMMMMM!*

KLENZE

Fuck me, fuck me

EXEC TAKE US DOWN NOW