ARAUCARIA

A detective races to decipher a cryptic message left by a serial bomber. He soon realizes that the message reveals not the killer's identity, but the identity of his next victim.
SUPER: Araucaria: Any of several evergreen coniferous trees of the genus Araucaria native to South America and Australia, having awl-shaped leaves and whorled branches and including the monkey puzzle.

INT. CONCERT HALL- NIGHT

A symphony orchestra plays a moving classical piece.

A FEMALE VIOLINIST, tall, brunette, beautiful. Her eyes closed, lost in the rousing music she plays flawlessly from memory.

A MAN sits to the rear of the packed auditorium. We cannot see his face, only a newspaper on his lap. The headline reads:

"CITY IN MOURNING AS BOMBER CLAIMS THREE MORE LIVES-
Investigators taunted by cryptic messages"

The man turns over the newspaper to reveal a half-completed crossword puzzle.

His pen hovers over a particular clue:

"The sum of nothing (6)"

He hesitates momentarily then fills in the answer:

"C-Y-P-H-E-R"

A thin, satisfied smile spreads across his face.

INT. OFFICE- NIGHT

Darkness but for one illuminated desk.

HARRY WALTERS, late thirties with short, salt-and-pepper hair sits alone at his desk, his face half in shadow. He looks like he hasn't slept in a week.
On the desk; a steaming cup of coffee next to a framed photograph- the female violinist from the concert. A young boy (8) sits on her lap.

Harry stares at a scrap of paper, eyes narrowed: focused.

A door opens, bathing the room in cold light from the hallway. Harry looks up.

    HARRY
    That you, Coop?

DON COOPER (40), a burly man in an ill-fitting suit strides into the room.

    COOPER
    Jesus, Harry. I thought I told you to go home.

    HARRY
    No rest for the wicked, eh?
    What's your excuse?

    COOPER
    We got a lead. Anonymous caller... says we might be interested in an apartment on a hundred and third.

    HARRY
    You get a trace?

    COOPER
    Partial, it'll take some time. A squad car's on the way. I told 'em to wait for the cavalry.

    HARRY
    Think it's another hoax?

    COOPER
    We won't find out sitting round here. Wanna tag along?

Harry looks at his scrap of paper, shakes his head.

    COOPER (CONT'D)
    You said it yourself. The clues are vague, the answers even more so... He's fucking with us, Harry. Leave it to the cryptologists.

    HARRY
    Maybe you're right... but there's something here, something useful. (MORE)
HARRY (cont’d)
It's almost as if he wants to be found.

COOPER
He's got to you, hasn't he?

Harry leans back in his chair, runs a hand through his hair.

HARRY
Hell, he's got the whole city in a panic. He's indiscriminate... women, children, you name it. It's all a game to him. The bombs are so small we'd need an army of dogs just to sniff him out.

Cooper points to the piece of paper in his hand.

COOPER
You think you're gonna win, playing by his rules?

HARRY
All pieces in the puzzle, Coop.

COOPER
Well I'm going where the action is, I'll keep you posted.

HARRY
You do that. I'll probably be here when you get back.

COOPER
I don't doubt it.

Cooper leaves the room.

Harry turns back to his scrap of paper. A message is printed on the page:

"NAY TO THRILL HER WITH WAGNER’S COMPOSITION, FOR IT IS DOOMED TO FAIL - ARAUCARIA"

Harry frowns in concentration, reaches for his coffee- it's cold.

EXT. CAR PARK- NIGHT- RAIN

MARIA WALTERS, the violinist from the concert, runs to her car. She wears a long coat and carries a violin case.

Close behind her is JOSHUA (8), the boy from the photograph.
They reach the car and hurry inside.

INT. CAR- SAME

Maria puts the violin case in the back seat and sits in the driver’s seat, Joshua next to her.

MARIA
Seat belt, Josh. There’s a good boy.

Joshua fastens his seat belt. He looks bored.

Maria turns the heaters up to full and flicks on the radio.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
... experts believe the bomb was concealed inside a handheld radio. Three people died and dozens were injured in this, the latest in a series of apparently motiveless attacks...

Maria switches off the radio and starts the car.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING- NIGHT

Police cars line the street, swirling blue lights illuminate an aging grey apartment building.

The street is cordoned off and crowds of residents are gathered a safe distance across the road.

A large police van is parked on sidewalk, painted on the side is: Bomb Disposal Unit.

Cooper walks purposefully towards the building. An OFFICER puts out a hand to stop him in his tracks.

OFFICER
Detective Cooper.

COOPER (anxious)
Is it him?

OFFICER
Sure as hell looks that way, but he’ll be long gone by now. BDUs are in there as we speak.

COOPER
They found anything?
OFFICER
(shrugs)
I just got here myself. Whatever it was, they had reason to evacuate the building... Looks like our man.

COOPER
As soon as bomb squad's done their job, I want in.

OFFICER
Absolutely, sir. You'll be the first to know.

INT. OFFICE- NIGHT

Harry sits at his desk, sipping a fresh cup of coffee. He has letters from a Scrabble set spread across his desk. A jumble of vowels and consonants- nonsense.

Harry looks at the scrap of paper, the word 'composition' has been underlined in red pen.

He lets out a deep, tired sigh.

EXT. WALTERS’ HOUSE- NIGHT- RAIN

Maria’s car pulls into the driveway.

Joshua jumps out and runs up to the front door while Maria retrieves her violin from the back seat.

JOSHUA (O.S.)
Look mummy!

Maria looks to see Joshua waving a large brown envelope.

MARIA
Where did you find that?

JOSHUA
It was on the doorstep.

She takes it from him and examines it. It's completely blank, no address, nothing.

MARIA
C'mon, let's get inside.

INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM- SAME

Darkness.
A red light blinks on the answer-phone.

The lights come on and Joshua runs into the room. He grabs a radio-controlled car from the sofa and starts playing with it.

Maria follows, still looking at the mysterious envelope.

She walks to the answer-phone and presses 'play'.

BEEP

HARRY (V.O.)
Hi honey. I'm gonna be home late tonight. Something's come up at work. Hope the show went well. I'll try not to wake you when I get home. Be good, Josh. Love you both. Bye!

Maria sighs, sits on the couch. She slides a finger under the seal of the envelope and pops it open.

INT. OFFICE- NIGHT

Harry sits at his desk, a slightly puzzled look on his face. He looks at the scrap of paper:

"NAY TO THRILL HER WITH WAGNER'S COMPOSITION, FOR IT IS DOOMED TO FAIL- ARAUCARIA"

He then looks down at the desk. He's spelled out a word with the Scrabble letters:

"H-A-R-R-Y"

Several letters still remain. Harry stares at the message.

HARRY
(quietly)
Doomed to fail...

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, BALCONY- NIGHT

Cooper walks quickly along the balcony, followed by a team of forensics officers carrying various equipment.

They approach an apartment at the end of the balcony. A YOUNG OFFICER waits at the door.

YOUNG OFFICER
Power's out... a precaution.
Cooper flicks on a flashlight and shines it in the officer's face.

COOPER
(smiling)
Thank you, son.

He pushes past him and into the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT-HALLWAY- SAME

Darkness.

A flashlight scans the decaying walls as Cooper moves through the hallway.

It's empty.

He steps through a doorway into the...

LIVING ROOM

The flashlight sweeps across the room. A dingy sofa, an old coffee table, several reference books stacked against the wall. No other furniture to speak of.

The beam of the flashlight moves towards a doorway at the far side of the room.

BEDROOM

A small room, illuminated by the dim orange glow from the street outside.

A bare mattress, heavily stained. Stacks of LPs line the walls, maybe a hundred or more.

The flashlight dances into the room as Cooper appears in the doorway.

He looks around, eventually resting his light on a toolkit-wire cutters, duct tape, various other equipment.

Next to the tool kit is a record player. The lid has been removed revealing loose wires.

INT. WALTERS' HOUSE, LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Joshua plays with his radio-controlled car, tearing it around the living room.
Maria sits on the sofa. She slides open the envelope and removes an old 12 inch record. Examining the sleeve, she sees it's Wagner's opera: ‘Siegfried’.

She smiles. Looks inside the envelope for some clue as to who it's from, finds nothing.

She removes the record from its sleeve. It looks old, scratched, but playable.

She walks to the record player and lifts the lid, carefully placing the record on the platter.

As she lowers the tone arm, OPERATIC MUSIC fills the room.

Maria turns up the volume, drowning out the sounds of Joshua's toy car.

Her face relaxes into a contented smile as the music builds.

INT. DARKENED ROOM- NIGHT

Complete darkness but for a small television set showing a news report.

TELEVISION- PRESS CONFERENCE- DAY

Harry Walters stands before a crowd of journalists.

HARRY
In light of recent events, we are urging the public to be extra vigilant, and to report any suspicious behavior to the authorities immediately. We are confident that, with your help, the perpetrators of these despicable acts will be brought to justice.

REPORTER
Is it true that you’ve received another message from the bomber?

HARRY
I'm unable to comment on that at this time. If you have any further questions please direct them to my colleague, thank you.

Harry departs, chased away by a flurry of questions. The television switches off.

 Darkness. Silence but for the low sound of breathing.
INT. OFFICE- NIGHT

Harry sits in a trance-like state, staring at the letters spread across the table.

His hand slowly reaches for the phone but it RINGS before he gets there. Harry almost jumps out of his seat.

He regains his composure and answers.

HARRY
Walters.

YVONNE (V.O.)
Harry, it's Yvonne. Is Detective Cooper there?

HARRY
No, he's chasing a lead. What's it about?

YVONNE (V.O.)
The phone call... the anonymous tip.

HARRY
Yes?

YVONNE (V.O.)
We got a trace.

Harry fumbles for a pen.

HARRY
Give me the address.

YVONNE (V.O.)
It's a public phone booth.

HARRY
Where?

YVONNE (V.O.)
Argyle Street, a pay phone next to the concert hall.

Harry scribbles it down.

HARRY
You sent someone out there?

YVONNE (V.O.)
For what it's worth.
HARRY

Thanks, Yvonne. I’ll let Cooper know.

Harry ends the call and is about to dial again when he stops suddenly, looking at his notes.

HARRY

(puzzled)

Argyle street...

He looks worried. Picks up the phone and dials a number from memory.

INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Music fills the room.

Joshua sits on the sofa, racing his toy car around the living room. Maria can be seen preparing a sandwich in the kitchen.

The phone rings - drowned out by the music.

Joshua doesn't notice. His attention is on the toy car as it weaves its way around the dining table.

INSERT: THE RECORD PLAYER. The LP is almost halfway through. A small wire is connected to the tone arm, it looks just slightly out of place.

BACK TO SCENE

The phone continues to ring. Joshua is oblivious.

INT. OFFICE - SAME

Harry looks perplexed as the phone rings and rings.

He glances at his desk. Something suddenly occurs to him. He puts down the phone and quickly rearranges the Scrabble letters:

“THE WRITINGS ON THE WALL, HARRY”

Harry’s face goes pale.

HARRY

For it is doomed to fail.
INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Forensics officers set up a series of U.V. lights around the room.

Cooper stands in the doorway.

A FORENSICS OFFICER flicks on the U.V. lights, bathing the room in cold, blue-hued light.

Cooper sees something on the wall above the sofa.

    COOPER
    There’s something on the wall.
    Turn it round.

The Forensics Officer adjusts the light towards the back wall revealing a message, invisible until now, written in U.V. paint:

   "SIEGFRIED"

Everyone turns to stare at the message.

    COOPER
    A name... German?

    FORENSICS OFFICER
    It’s also the name of an Opera by Wagner.

Cooper looks at him, puzzled. The man misreads his expression.

    FORENSICS OFFICER
    (embarrassed)
    My wife’s a big fan.

Cooper reaches for his phone.

INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Music still plays.

Joshua races his car around the living room. The car swerves around the sofa and speeds across the rug by the fireplace.

BANG!

The car slams into a table leg, knocking the phone off the table. It rests on the floor- the receiver now off the hook.
Joshua ignores it and continues playing.

The car races back around the sofa and into the other table.

BANG!

THE NEEDLE ON THE RECORD SKIPS... but continues playing.

MARIA (O.S.)
Joshua!

Joshua smiles.

INT. OFFICE— NIGHT

Harry is still at his desk, staring at the message before him.

The phone rings. He takes a deep breath and answers it.

HARRY
Walters.

INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM— NIGHT

Cooper stands in the center of the living room while the forensics team work around him.

COOPER
Harry, it’s Coop.

HARRY (V.O.)
Any news?

COOPER
Looks like we found his home away from home but our man is nowhere to be found... Any luck with your puzzle?

HARRY (V.O.)
Yeah, I think it’s a message for me. But I just don’t get it.

COOPER
Maybe this’ll help... Does the name ‘Siegfried’ mean anything to you?

INT. OFFICE— SAME

Harry’s jaw drops. He glances at the photo of his wife and child, a look of disbelief on his face.
COOPER (V.O.)
Harry?

Harry reads the message again. The color drains from his face.

HARRY
Tell me it wasn’t written on the wall.

COOPER (V.O.)
(surprised)
Yeah... how’d you guess?

HARRY
Cooper. Get someone over to my house NOW!

COOPER (V.O.)
Your house? You don’t think...

HARRY
Just do it!

COOPER (V.O.)
Harry, I... I don’t understand...

HARRY
Siegfried, Coop. It’s my wife’s maiden name.

COOPER (V.O.)
(quietly)
Oh Jesus Christ...

Harry ends the call, grabs his keys off the desk and dashes out of the office.

INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM–NIGHT

The opera music is nearing its conclusion, the volume now turned down low.

Joshua sleeps on the sofa. Maria sits next to him, softly stroking his hair, enjoying the music.

INT. HARRY’S CAR– DRIVING– NIGHT

Harry speeds along the wet road, his mobile phone in his hand. He hits redial- the line’s busy.

HARRY
Shit!
INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

The record is drawing to an end.

Maria sits on the sofa with Joshua in her arms.

A swirling blue light penetrates the curtains. Maria stands and walks to the window.

INT. HARRY’S CAR- DRIVING

Harry tears through the streets, swerves into a suburban cul-de-sac. The fear is visible on his face.

INT. WALTERS’ HOUSE, LIVING ROOM

Maria peers through the curtains at a police car outside. Two officers approach the house.

The room falls silent.

Behind her, the record has ended and the tone arm slides towards the centre of the platter.

Joshua sleeps silently on the sofa.

The tone arm reaches the centre and the trigger catches. The record player EXPLODES.

EXT. WALTERS’ HOUSE- SAME

The front windows SHATTER as a fireball leaps from within.

The police officers dive for cover on the front lawn, shards of glass and debris shower down on them.

Harry’s car screeches to a halt outside.

INT/EXT. HARRY’S CAR

Harry looks on in horror, his face illuminated by dancing firelight.

He gets out of the car and walks towards the raging inferno that was his house. Tears roll down his face. He begins to weep.

FADE TO BLACK.