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# ALOIS NEBEL

A FILM BY TOMÁŠ LUŇÁK

*Summer 1989. Alois Nebel, a lonely train dispatcher at a small railway station on the Czechoslovak border, lives a quiet life. Only sometimes the fog rolls in and he hallucinates, seeing ghosts and shadows from the dark times of the World War II. One day, a silent stranger appears at the station and propels Alois on the journey to resolving his nightmares.*



## SYNOPSIS

It is the end of summer, 1989. Alois Nebel works as a train dispatcher at a small railway station in the Sudetenland, a mountainous region on the Czechoslovak border. He is a loner who prefers old timetables to people, and he finds the loneliness of the station tranquil - except when the fog rolls in. Then he hallucinates, seeing ghosts and shadows from the dark past of this region where after WWII harsh revenge was exacted on the German population.

Alois cannot get rid of these nightmares and with the help of the railway worker Wachek, who is eyeing Alois' job, he eventually ends up in a sanatorium. There he gets to know The Mute, a mysterious man carrying an old photograph who was arrested by the police after crossing the border. Not even electroshocks would make him speak and the police is unable to find out why he came to the Sudetenland or who he was looking for. One day The Mute takes his chance and escapes into the woods.

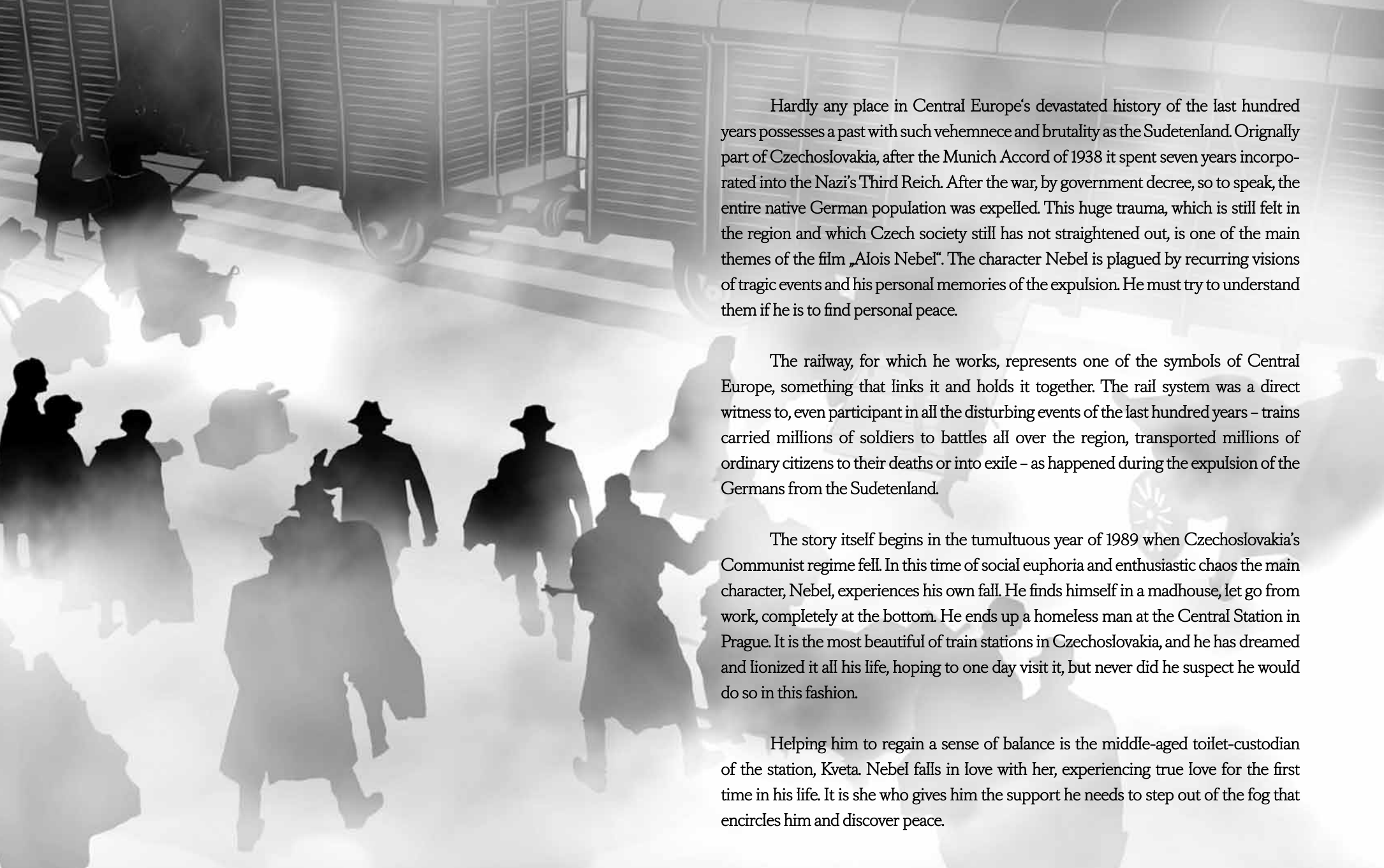
Alois gets better and leaves the sanatorium. But things have changed outside. The Berlin wall has been torn down and the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia fell. Without a job and a place to stay, Alois does not know what to do. He decides to go to the Prague railway headquarters to seek help. There he finds the love of his life, Květa the toilet custodian, and returns to the mountains to meet The Mute and fight the ghosts which have been haunting him for so long.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The German word „Nebel“ means „Fog“. If read backwards we find a totally different German word, „Leben“ – „Life“. And it is a life hidden in a fog of feelings and memories that is exactly what makes up our trilogy of graphic novels, „Alois Nebel“. The title is also the name of our main protagonist, a train dispatcher in his fifties, but still in many ways an adolescent, who works at Bily Potok, a small depot, lost in the mountains.

„Alois Nebel“ came to be in the year 2003, when the first book of the graphic novel, „Bily Potok“, came out. Two more followed, „Central Station“ (2004) and „Zlate Hory“ (2005). In 2006, the three titles were collected in one volume named after the protagonist. It is from this collection that the story that forms the basis of the screenplay emerged.

The storyline is set in the Jeseník mountains in what is today the Czech-Polish border, an area formerly known as the Sudetenland. The illustrator and co-screenwriter of the film, Jaromír 99, comes from this region. The region – and also the world of trains – is both near and dear to the other co-screenwriter and author of the original graphic novels, Jaroslav Rudis. His grandfather, Alois, actually served as a switchman at a station similar to the one in the story both before and after the Second World War. In many ways he was the model upon which the protagonist is based.



Hardly any place in Central Europe's devastated history of the last hundred years possesses a past with such vehemence and brutality as the Sudetenland. Originally part of Czechoslovakia, after the Munich Accord of 1938 it spent seven years incorporated into the Nazi's Third Reich. After the war, by government decree, so to speak, the entire native German population was expelled. This huge trauma, which is still felt in the region and which Czech society still has not straightened out, is one of the main themes of the film „Alois Nebel“. The character Nebel is plagued by recurring visions of tragic events and his personal memories of the expulsion. He must try to understand them if he is to find personal peace.

The railway, for which he works, represents one of the symbols of Central Europe, something that links it and holds it together. The rail system was a direct witness to, even participant in all the disturbing events of the last hundred years – trains carried millions of soldiers to battles all over the region, transported millions of ordinary citizens to their deaths or into exile – as happened during the expulsion of the Germans from the Sudetenland.

The story itself begins in the tumultuous year of 1989 when Czechoslovakia's Communist regime fell. In this time of social euphoria and enthusiastic chaos the main character, Nebel, experiences his own fall. He finds himself in a madhouse, let go from work, completely at the bottom. He ends up a homeless man at the Central Station in Prague. It is the most beautiful of train stations in Czechoslovakia, and he has dreamed and lionized it all his life, hoping to one day visit it, but never did he suspect he would do so in this fashion.

Helping him to regain a sense of balance is the middle-aged toilet-custodian of the station, Kveta. Nebel falls in love with her, experiencing true love for the first time in his life. It is she who gives him the support he needs to step out of the fog that encircles him and discover peace.



The graphic novel „Alois Nebel“ is drawn in a raw, sharp, edgy black-and-white style which sums up the uneasy atmosphere of the time and place. In adopting this approach, Artist Jaromir 99 was inspired by American comics of the 1950s, socialist realism and motifs from traditional paper cutouts which remain a typical form of folk art in the Jeseník mountain area.

In terms of realizing the graphic novel into a film we deliberated about going with a classical hand-drawn animation approach, aware that it would involve practical difficulties and time-intensiveness, but also deliver a look that would best comply with the aesthetic of original material. We didn't want to follow the current trend in which most comics are adapted into straightforward live-action films.

In the end we settled upon rotoscoping, a form of animation in which the drawing is done over a previously shot image. This technique was initially utilized in the year 1915. At first, the script is shot as if it were a live-action film, with real actors performing in real locations or on real sets. The footage is then thoroughly redrawn. The image that is generated is very similar to a classic hand-drawn animated image, but movement is completely fluid and the facial expressions and general physiognomy of the actors can be maintained.

Ultimately, rotoscoping technology comes nearest to our conception of how best to adapt the graphic novel „Alois Nebel“ into a film that remains true to the source material's form. We will be able to conserve the primary design of the books and, simultaneously, enrich it through the subtleties that live human acting always brings. „Alois Nebel“ is a film about wandering, about finding one's way and repeatedly getting lost in the fog of history, about looking for peace and love no matter how late in life one may be.



## TOMÁŠ LUŇÁK



Born August 30, 1974 in Zlín, Czech Republic

### BIOGRAPHY

Tomáš Luňák studied animation direction at the Zlín Film School and Prague Film Faculty FAMU. Since graduating he has directed a number of music videos and promotional films. Alois Nebel is his feature film debut.

### FILMOGRAPHY

#### SHORTS

Šepot [The Whisper] (1995) – puppet film, 5 min., graduation film, Zlín Film School

Expedice [The Expedition] (1998) – drawn animation, 3 min., FAMU

Akrobat [Acrobat] (2000) – puppet film, 5 min., mid-graduation film, FAMU

Čtvrtek, pátek [Thursday, Friday] (2006) – combination of live action and animation, 6 min., FAMU



## ALOIS NEBEL / MIROSLAV KROBOT

He works as a train dispatcher in the remote train station of Břfý Potok, as his dad did. He's a loner, an overgrown adolescent. Nebel loves his work and wishes for nothing more than quiet. He enjoys reading the old timetables, because it relaxes him. Trains always run the same.

As a small child after the World War II, he was witness to a dramatic expulsion of Germans from the region, which was coordinated through the station where he and his family lived. This greatest trauma of his life haunts him through fog-laden hallucinations. Alois Nebel is a memory of a region and he is not able to carve out of his head all the evil that occurred there.

When he loses his job, he decides to go to the Prague Central Station. There, Nebel comes across the love of his life, toilet custodian Květa. It's as if he's gotten wings – never in his life has he been happier. For Květa he would do anything. He is in love for the first time.



## KVĚTA / MARIE LUDVÍKOVÁ

Květa is a toilet custodian at the Central Station in Prague. She is the widow of a dispatcher; she loves railway men and order. Her booth in the toilets is a kind of tiny sitting room, the only cheerful place amid the jumble and chaos of the Central Station. She is a tough, smart woman, who knows the score and doesn't get lost.

Květa feels in Nebel goodness, that he's a good man. Moreover, there's something of the Samaritan in her and she wants to help him. Her beauty and certainty contradict Nebel's sense of being lost. He finds in Květa serenity he's never found elsewhere. Theirs is a belated love at first sight.



## WACHEK / LEOŠ NOHA

Wachek works at the train station Břfý Potok as the switchman but he'd rather become the dispatcher and get his hands on Nebel's apartment. He's an informer and a schemer.

He is the son of Old Wachek, the manager of the area's campground. Tirelessly he traffics with Polish middlemen and even officers of the Soviet army who have a unit stationed nearby. In his mind, the Red Army having to leave Czechoslovakia will bring on the biggest racket of his life. He buys absolutely everything he can from the soldiers and stores it at the campgrounds his father runs. During the flood, he will lose everything, but maybe he will come to understand something.



## THE MUTE / KAREL RODEN

The Mute comes to Břfý Potok to take the revenge for the crime committed after World War II. His mother, Dorothe, was raped by Old Wachek during the deportation of the Germans.

Equipped with his silence and an old photograph from the station at Břfý Potok, his one reference point, he goes forth with purpose, intent that no man will get in his way.



## OLD WACHEK / ALOIS ŠVEHLÍK

Old Wachek is the father of Wachek. After the War, he actively participated in the expulsion of the Germans. He killed the switchman Müller and raped his fiancé Dorothe.

He is a brutal, cold human being without feelings. He does everything with the conviction that he knows best and that he does everything best and most perfectly. From the moment the Mute appears in the region he begins to be afraid and have fore-bodings of the end.



## DOROTHE / TEREZA VOŘÍŠKOVÁ

Dorothe is a young Sudeten girl that takes care of small Alois Nebel after his mother passed away. She's engaged with the German Müller, but Old Wachek is in love with her as well. When the war is over, most German citizens are forced to leave Czechoslovakia. Old Wachek offers Dorothe to marry him, so that she can stay, but she rejects him. While the trains with Germans are leaving Bílý Potok, Old Wachek forces Dorothe to stay and rapes her. Later, Dorothe leaves Bílý Potok with a little baby in her arms.





## CAST

|                       |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Alois Nebel           | Miroslav Krobot           |
| Květa                 | Marie Ludvíková           |
| The Mute              | Karel Roden               |
| Wachek                | Leoš Noha                 |
| Old Wachek            | Alois Švehlík             |
| Dorothe               | Tereza Voříšková          |
| Bartender             | Ján Sedal                 |
| Russian officer       | Jiří Štrébl               |
| Psychiatrist          | Marek Daniel              |
| Nurse                 | Klára Melíšková           |
| Policemen             | Jan Vondráček, Karel Zima |
| Oida                  | Ondřej Malý               |
| Berta                 | Simona Babčáková          |
| Director              | Ivan Trojan               |
| Young Alois Nebel     | Kryštof Plášil            |
| Alois Nebel's father  | Tomáš Bambušek            |
| Young Wachek's father | David Švehlík             |
| Dorothe's husband     | Marek Matějka             |

## CREW

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| director                       | Tomáš Luňák  |
| screenplay                     | Jaroslav Rudiš, Jaromír 99<br>(based on the graphic novel „Alois Nebel“)   |
| designer                       | Jaromír 99   |
| music                          | Petr Kružík, Ondřej Ježek  |
| director of photography        | Jan Baset Strítežský   |
| editor                         | Petr Říha  |
| sound designer                 | Viktor Ekrt, Ondřej Ježek  |
| set designer                   | Henrich Boraros  |
| costume designer               | Katarína Hollá   |
| animation and VFX supervisor   | Noro Držiak  |
| postproduction supervisor      | Aleš Baumgartner   |
| head animator                  | Pavla Dudová   |
| head background artist         | Johana Ziková  |
| head composer                  | Tomáš Hájek  |
| producer                       | Pavel Strnad   |
| co-producers                   | Thanassis Karathanos, Karl Baumgartner (Pallas Film)<br>Henrich Držiak (Tobogang)<br>Jaroslav Kučera (Česká televize)<br>Vít Komrzý (UPP)<br>Radim Janeš, Pavel Rejholec (Soundsquare) |
| line producer                  | Milan Kuchynka   |
| production manager - shooting  | Marta Dudáková   |
| production manager - animation | Veronika Lerchová  |

# CONTACTS

## CONTACTS PRODUCTION

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# TECHNICAL DETAILS

Screening format: DCP, 35mm, 24 fps, 1:1.85,

black/white, Dolby Digital

Length: 84

Language: Czech



## PRODUCERS

NEGATIV  
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film productions



CESKA TELEVIZE

PALLAS FILM



RU P P



SOUNDSQUARE

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