

THE SACRIFICE

An Entry in the 2014 Windhammer Prize for
Short Gamebook Fiction

Written by Paul Struth
Copyright 2014

FAUSTUS: How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?
MEPHISTOPHELES: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it

Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus*

England, summer 1919. Robert Cantlow has returned from the Great War a changed man. His friend will be forced to confront a terrible new enemy – but has his own battles to fight.

Peter Joyce was judged unfit for military service because of his disability, a clubfoot he has suffered since birth. Spared the horror of the trenches when so many other young men were not, he torments himself with accusations of failure and inadequacy. Now he is to be reminded of another, older wound. Coming down to breakfast one morning, he finds this letter amongst his post:

Midford Grange, July 6th

Dear Peter,

It is a long time since we have had the pleasure of your company at the Grange. The last five years have been a trial to us all. Forgive my presumption in writing to you now but we are grown quite desperate and know not where else to turn, if not to you. It concerns Robert.

When he returned safely from the War, I gave thanks that a mother's prayers had been answered. But he is not the dear sweet boy who took ship for France. In fact, he has changed so completely that I sometimes doubt whether he is my own son. He was perfectly beastly to Evie during his last visit here. His letters are infrequent and only increase my uneasiness. Now we hear, quite by accident, that he has broken off his engagement to Helen Frobisher, a move which has made the poor girl, and us, desperately unhappy.

I cannot but think that it is the pernicious influence of that Woman which has brought about this unwholesome alteration in dear Robert. If only half the things that are whispered about S.O. are true then she must be the wickedest woman in the world. Unless her hold on Robert can be loosened, I fear she will be his ruin.

I know that you and Robert were close, I venture to say inseparable, during your time at Cambridge (how I wish I could call back those happier days!). If you have any influence over my son, I beg you to use it now. Our own entreaties have been useless.

Robert has taken rooms in London (his card is enclosed) to be near to her. If you will only see him and make some report of your visit it will be a great comfort to me. Better yet, why don't you come to Midford yourself for the weekend? We will all be very pleased to welcome you again and I may say more than I am willing to commit to paper.

Yours in desperate hope,

Alice Cantlow

How to play *The Sacrifice*

In this interactive fiction, you will play the part of Peter Joyce. Your choices will decide how his story ends. Before you start, please make a note of Peter's key stats, LIFE and TIME.

Life

Peter begins the story with 3 LIVES. Each time he loses a life, he has survived a brush with death that might have killed a less fortunate man. When all lives are lost, however, his luck has finally run out and the story is at an end.

Time

The story begins on a Sunday afternoon. Occasionally, the text will ask you to 'Move the DAY forward 1'. The first time this happens, change Sunday to Monday. The next time you come across this instruction, change Monday to Tuesday, and so on. Keep track of which day it is in your Notebook (below).

Passwords

As the story unfolds you may come across words or phrases highlighted in **bold** type. Make a note of these **passwords** when you see them – they unlock different parts of the story and may influence its outcome.

Some of the choices presented in the text also include bold type – you may only select these options if you have the relevant password written in your Notebook. For example, you may only choose 'I unlock the door with the **key**' if you have already noted the word **key**.

Finally, please be warned that not all the clues needed to solve the mystery are highlighted in this way. Good luck!

Notebook

NAME: Peter Joyce

OBJECTIVE:

LIVES: 3

DAY: Sunday

PASSWORDS:

1

MIDFORD is indelibly associated with a particular period of my life, as strongly as is Cambridge itself; more so, perhaps, since I have never returned until now. As the trees part to reveal the lake and the expanse of wet lawn leading up to the Tudor manor house, I feel that I am stepping back into my own past.

I am given my old room in the tower, so familiar I might never have been away. And yet everything has changed. The grey house is filled with ghosts. I stand at the window, watching the falling rain, and lose myself in memories. That soft footfall on the stairs might be hers. His hand shields the lamp as both of them stifle a giggle, creeping up the stairs in an attempt to scare 'poor dear Peter'. The door opens and I whirl round, expectant – but it is only an apologetic maid, bringing me another blanket to ward off the unseasonable chill.

On Sunday afternoon the weather relents, and Alice Cantlow insists that we sit on the lawn 'to enjoy the sun while it lasts'. To think that this is July! Everyone agrees that it has been an awful summer; George tells me the local farmers are made desperate with worry; and yet the leaden skies seem to complement perfectly the gloom that has descended on Midford Grange. We are all, I think, living under a cloud.

I turn the phrase over in my head (how very English it sounds) and my mind wanders. Does the weather influence our moods? I remember how hot it was that other summer, five years ago, and how happy I was then. As if I had the sun inside me. I remember walking up to the pavilion and taking my seat in its cool shade, that I was glad to take the weight off my leg. Helen was already there. We talked and laughed for several minutes before I realised that we were alone together. If that sounds ridiculous, you have to remember that it had always been the three of us. We were inseparable, Robert Cantlow, Helen Frobisher and I.

I was in love with her, of course, and never confessed it. Never, that is, except lying awake at night or veiled in the silken words of the poet: *Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Ilium? Sweet Helen...* And now, suddenly, here she was beside me, no spectre but a living breathing woman, and we were alone together at last. When she laughed, she leaned against me and I could feel my throat tighten.

'H, will you forgive me if I say something ridiculous?'

And I did, I said many ridiculous things but none of them the three little words that had grown so large they threatened to burst my chest open. I talked until she was no longer listening, no longer looking at me. Then I turned and I saw Robert strolling towards the pavilion, a shining knight in cricketing whites, and she left her seat beside me and ran towards him. At Christmas that year, they would become engaged.

He was not in the first rush to enlist. Most men were not. That is a lie that has gained currency over the years, as the casualties mounted. Instead it was I, poor lame Peter Joyce, who waited outside the recruiting office in those hot days of August 1914. The pain of being close to her, and yet so far away, had by then become such a torment that I would gladly have run towards the German guns to escape it. Fool that I was, I imagined that she might shed tears on my grave. But, of course, the doctors rejected my willing sacrifice, and my headlong rush to martyrdom came to a sorry end, tripped up, as it were, by my own foot.

When his turn came, Robert was accepted at once. We lost contact during the war years but I heard through a friend that he had won the DSO at Cambrai, that he had become a hero. I did not begrudge him that, anymore than I begrudged him his good fortune in love. But I cannot find it in myself to forgive him for this latest desertion.

I can still hardly believe that he has abandoned Helen to be with another woman, a woman ten

years older than him and shadowed by the darkest rumours. She has achieved a certain notoriety by holding séances at her London home. Some accuse her of the worst kind of deception, others of necromancy, claiming that she really does speak with the dead.

'I am sure she has cast a spell on him,' Alice Cantlow is saying. 'Peter?'

I open my eyes.

'I say, I am sure that Sylvia Osborne is a witch.'

'It is *Lady* Sylvia Osborne,' her husband rumbles, 'and one does not say such things about a lady...'

'Even if they may be true? And, anyway, she is not a real lady but only one by marriage.'

'She is a modern woman, they say.' George Cantlow leaves it there, and does not venture his opinion on modern women.

'Well I wish she were a thing of the past. Peter? Do say something, my dear, you have been so very quiet this afternoon.'

I apologise for my reticence and ask Alice Cantlow...

about Lady Sylvia Osborne

turn to 41

about Helen Frobisher

turn to 56

for the latest news of Robert

turn to 19

2

I am not quick enough and the bullet tears a bright stitch in my sleeve. I clamp my hand over the wound, conscious for a moment only of the pain. There is a clatter of heavy boots on the stairs and the soldier appears at my side – no corpse but a living breathing man.

'You're not dead?'

'Nor you I think. Though it was not for want of my trying.'

He apologises for shooting at me and inspects the wound.

'Is it bad?' I ask, trying to appear bravely unconcerned.

Roll two dice. If the number is 6 or less, the wound is worse than it first appears and Peter must lose 1 LIFE. If he is still alive, turn to 63.

3

A man's voice from the far side of the table asks the medium to inquire after his dead mother. Lady Sylvia calls on the spirit in a loud voice, as if she were merely waiting in the next room. Three times she calls, without receiving a reply. At first I assume this to be a part of the theatre. But then I notice that the woman to my right is fidgeting in her seat; Sylvia herself appears uneasy. At length she declares that 'There is no one here tonight by that name'. Then she opens her eyes and abruptly announces that the séance is at an end.

A low mutter spreads around the table. The butler reappears and turns on the lights, revealing a group of surprised and very disappointed guests. Sylvia herself stands up as if she is about to flee the room. But she checks herself and remains to see her guests out, nodding to each in turn. As I pass her, she is turning the amulet over in her agitated fingers. 'Damn him,' she mutters, 'damn him to hell.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8).

Helen drops the poker and puts her hands to her face, horrified by what she has done. Tears run down across her cheeks. There is a splash of something dreadful at the collar of her dress.

I take her in my arms and hold her close. She turns her head towards me.

'He would have killed you,' she whispers.

'It wasn't Jim.'

I repeat the words over and over until she believes them. There is even a sense in which it is true. The dead thing was not James Frobisher, even if the police report will say that it was.

'No,' she murmurs. 'Oh Peter, if I had lost you too!'

Our lips are only inches apart. And then there is no distance at all.

Peter has achieved the OBJECTIVE Sweet Helen.

I would gladly spend the next few days with my **true love**. But I cannot rest. James Frobisher was a warning that something terrible is about to happen.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

10

She listens to my account with growing interest.

'Let us suppose for a moment that this man really has risen from the grave. I would still have to ask you: what has that to do with me?'

'You can summon the dead. You have admitted as much yourself.'

'Ah, it is one thing to commune with spirits, quite another to call them back to life. I would not do it. I should fear to.'

She stands up. The cadaverous butler appears in the doorway, indicating that the audience is at an end. Lady Sylvia leans forward, her voice so low that only I can hear.

'Let me tell you a secret of my calling, Mr Joyce. Many people imagine that the skill of a medium lies in getting the dead to speak. That is a misconception. The dead are desperate to be heard and will speak to anyone willing to listen. The skill lies in *holding them back*.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8). If he would rather spend a day in the archives of the British Museum, researching Sir Clifford Osborne's archaeological excavations in Egypt, turn to 88.

11

We take position at the upstairs windows, from where we can command a good field of fire across the open lawn. Robert seems unable to comprehend the shotgun offered him but merely shakes his head in mute despair. Instead it is Mrs Cantlow who picks up the weapon and takes her place at our side.

'Now Alice...' her husband starts to object. But Alice's face is determined.

'I've shot plenty of pheasants in my time, George Cantlow. Don't you say I haven't!'

He grumbles at that but can make no further protest for we both know that Alice is a

countrywoman through and through. George looks helplessly at her, then at his son, before finally turning his anger and frustration against Evelyn.

‘Get away from the window, girl!’

Evelyn pouts and bites her knuckles, as if to choke back her indignation at this injustice. I would say something to console her but there is no time: below us, the first of the dead sailors are already crossing the lawn, their line wavering and spreading out like weed.

The lead shot tears through them, causing some to crumple and fall, others to stare at their dead limbs in amazement. A howl of rage escapes the rest, a thin banshee wail. Their hate-filled eyes rake the walls until they light upon us, crouching nervously at our posts. There is time for another volley and then the dead begin to run towards the house, hands reaching out as if they would tear the very stones asunder. We pick them off one by one but even as we hasten to reload more are emerging from the black waters of the lake. Their numbers are too great that we have time to gun them all down.

Now we can hear a banging at the door as many fists hammer on the heavy oak timbers. Glass shatters somewhere down below and then we can hear the clatter of furniture being overturned. The dead are in the house.

As I come out onto the landing, the first of them are already at the foot of the stairs. I fire both barrels at once; wood splinters and the mangled sailors collapse back into the arms of their comrades, and then are trampled upon as the others struggle to reach me. I crack open the breech of the shotgun but my shaking fingers cannot remove the spent cartridges.

‘Peter!’ As I turn to Evelyn, she presses two loaded revolvers into my hands. Our eyes meet, hers wild and terrified, as mine must be, and I know that we are both wondering if this can really be the end. These are the memories I will take with me to the grave: the smell of gunsmoke mingling with the taint of rotted flesh, the clamour of the dead, the scrabble of their ruined limbs upon the stairs, and Evelyn’s dark eyes, wide and staring. Then I turn away from her and everything is lost in the deafening roar of the guns.

12

It leads me to a bedroom, the door of which stands open. Inside, the soft glow of a bedside lamp lights up a ghastly tableau. Lady Sylvia Osborne has been pulled from her bed and is now sprawled on the floor, helpless, as three uniformed fiends feast upon her. One soldier is bent over her neck, another bites into the wrist of her left arm, which he holds raised above her head. Their sergeant, temporarily sated, wipes her blood from his lips with a dirty sleeve. He almost growls at the sight of me, a low bestial sound.

I fire my **revolver** three times (turn to 89).

BUT if Peter is unarmed, or has fewer than three bullets remaining, turn to 66.

13

I hurry across to the house before the sniper can fire again. As I push open the door of Robert’s apartment, a figure rises to confront me. For a few moments we struggle together. The man is wearing army uniform but his face is flushed with warm vitality and the smells he gives off – fear and sweat – are not the characteristic dead stench I have become all too accustomed to. This is a living, breathing man. My opponent comes to the same conclusion and we step back from each other in the sudden realisation that we might be allies. He apologises for shooting at me – he had assumed that I, too, was one of the dead. Turn to 63.

14

I fight it away. It comes for me again. It can only be the pilot or the observer of the plane. I can see the remains of a helmet, the goggles on top. The smell of him is terrible. He is burned, terribly burned. His face is a sticky black mess from which only the eyes, white and staring, protrude. The sleeves of his jacket have burned away, exposing blackened flesh, the claw-like hands that reach for me.

We wrestle desperately and at each touch, whole flakes of skin are shedding. My hands are slick with the sooty mess and the stench in my nostrils is almost unbearable. It cannot be possible that such a terribly burned man can move let alone possess such strength. At length, I manage to fight free and pick up a fallen tree branch. I bring it down on the man's back. He falls but almost immediately struggles to rise. I bring the deadwood down again, this time on his head. There is a sickening crunch and the charcoal thing crumbles. This time it does not get up.

I stand there for a while, gulping in deep breaths. Then I throw the branch aside and I start to run, as fast as I can, out of the woods. The mess on my hands disgusts me, the smell on my clothes and in my hair disgusts me.

'What in God's name happened?' George Cantlow demands when I reach the house.

And I have to tell him – I am not sure.

I leave Midford on the next train

turn to 30

I decide to stay another day to get to the bottom of this mystery

turn to 47

15

No trains are running west. A crowd of desperate civilians has gathered at the entrance to Paddington station but is being kept back by the Army. The soldiers seem dazed; they have come to London expecting to parade through the streets and must now build barricades across them. Eight months after the Armistice they find themselves once more under attack. What will happen, I wonder, if they come face to face with a fallen comrade?

For now, though, there is discipline and some semblance of order. I think that the Army will get me to Midford – one way or another.

I steal an army truck

turn to 84

I drop the name of **Colonel Wytherington**

turn to 4

16

I do not know if I have the strength to write these words. My hand trembles, spotting the page with ink, rather than record the final horror. The blow crushed Robert's skull. But that was not the worst of it. I thank merciful Heaven that the women had by then fled the room and that only George and I were witness to what came next. For the thing that lay before us, maimed and bleeding, would not die...

The limbs twitch hideously like those of a squashed spider. The thing drags itself painfully across the floor, leaving behind a slick of gore. Is it trying to get away? To reach for some secret weapon? Sobbing with horror, George reloads his gun, intending to deliver the coup de grâce, but even a shotgun blast at close range cannot sever the thread that holds this thing to life. A sound bubbles out of the ruined mouth, as if it were trying to speak. But the bloody mess of bone and muscle no longer possesses that power. Instead it begins to inch itself forward, hands reaching out for – what? The bloody fingers begin to inscribe letters on the wall, a last message, but the effort of

reaching up proves too much for the fallen wreck.

'Paper! For God's sake, let him have pen and ink,' I cry.

It is agonising to watch the hesitant words form on the page, and almost at once be obscured by blood and horror. And all the time we are conscious of the terrible cries from without. Now we can hear a banging at the door as many fists hammer on the heavy oak timbers.

BURIED W SIDE OF GREENHOUSES. DESTROY IT. PLEASE.

Glass shatters somewhere down below and then we can hear the clatter of furniture being overturned. The dead are in the house.

'The backstairs!' George cries. 'You may still get out that way! Go!' Then he rushes out onto the landing. I hear the shotgun's roar, the moans of the dead. And then I am racing down the narrow stairs that lead to the servants' quarters, praying that the dead are not already waiting for me in the darkness below. Turn to 99.

17

Evelyn Cantlow has large brown eyes. Once I thought her stare to be that of a little owl, watchful and accusing; now those eyes seem like pools of dark water. I ask her what has happened to her brother.

'Let's not talk about Robert,' she says. 'I hear more than enough on that subject from mama. Besides, I haven't yet forgiven him.'

'**Forgiven** him? What for?'

'I told you that I don't want to talk about him.'

I change topics dutifully and ask her about Lady Sylvia Osborne instead.

'Your mother doesn't seem to like her very much.'

Evelyn pouts. 'I don't see why. I think it must be a fine thing to be independent. Though I wouldn't marry such an old fossil as Sir Clifford, ugh.' I don't say anything and after a while she adds 'Why shouldn't a woman paint her lips anyway?'

My lameness means that I am a poor match for her at badminton. She quickly grows tired of beating me and we rejoin her parents.

I tell the Cantlows that I should leave soon. I plan to catch the evening train back to London. Alice objects and says I should stay another day with them at Midford. She tells me that Evie will be glad of my company.

I thank her for her hospitality and agree to stay

turn to 52

I insist on catching the evening train

turn to 30

18

He gets up and walks across to the table, begins searching through the bottles for one that still contains a drop of wine.

'But of course it is. You always did have a weakness for her.' He glances sideways, revealing a spiteful smile. 'Did you think I didn't know? Well, you needn't look so sour about it.'

'You have thrown away a pearl,' I tell him, my voice shaking, 'and for what? To live like a swine. You are not worthy of her. You never were.'

'And you are?' he asks sharply. 'A useless cripple with not even the courage to confess his own feelings.'

My blow catches him on the side of the head. He falls heavily, knocking bottles off the table. One smashes. The man he called Friday comes rushing out and regards me with undisguised

malice.

Robert springs to his feet with something of his old vigour. 'You bloody bastard...'

I think for a moment that he is going to strike me but instead he laughs; laughs loud and long, confusing Friday, who is no longer certain what is happening. And then, just as abruptly, the laughter stops.

'Get out,' Robert says quietly. 'Go on, get out.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Helen (turn to 8) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

19

'He tells us so very little,' Alice frets. The letters she hands me are remarkable for their coldness, as if they had been penned by a complete stranger. Robert writes that he has rented a flat in west London but makes no mention of his situation or of his plans for the future. I realise that I am, after all, curious about the change that has overtaken him.

George Cantlow invites me inside to replenish our drinks. His study has been transformed into a kind of shrine to Robert, as if the man of beloved memory had passed away and a doppelganger has assumed his place in life. Here is a photograph of my old friend, posing proudly in his lieutenant's uniform. Here are the letters and postcards he sent home during his service in France. The centrepiece is a framed newspaper article headed "STORIES OF OFFICERS' BRAVE DEEDS"; almost the whole page is given up to a list of those decorated for conspicuous gallantry, prominent among them the name of T./CAPT. R. CANTLOW, DSO.

The older Cantlow points proudly to what I gather should be the Distinguished Service Order, but the presentation case is empty. He peers closer, as if only now aware of its absence. 'What the devil', he mutters, 'so he did take it with him after all.'

I venture the suggestion that it may be the War, rather than any woman, which has altered Robert so terribly (turn to 61).

We go back outside and I ask Alice about Lady Sylvia (turn to 41) or Helen (turn to 56).

20

I bring the poker down again and again, a torrent of blows. The thing crumples beneath them, falling to one knee. Helen screams, begging me to stop. But I do not stop until there is no hint of movement left in the terrible apparition and it is lying still and finally dead before me.

The poker falls from my hand and I turn, breathing heavily from the exertion. There is no other sound in the room. I am alone. 'H?'

She has locked herself in her bedroom. Behind the door I can hear her crying, unceasing floods of tears. I have killed her brother. It is left to me to call the police.

Miss Veale can add little to my story. She has recovered from her swoon but is still dazed and barely comprehends the questions directed to her. The constable casts a wary eye over the huddled body in the parlour, now draped with a blanket, and listens silently as I incriminate myself. I agree that it looks bad and willingly accompany him to the station to help with his enquiries. Two hours later, when the identity of the victim has been established, I am released without charge. The police cannot prosecute the murder of a man who was already dead.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

21

I see her white cardigan first, a bright flare against the undergrowth, and push towards it.

Evie is standing stock still, frozen in place by terror. Just a few metres in front of her is a man, or the remnants of one. All black, like a silhouette come to life.

It can only be the pilot or the observer of the plane. I can see the remains of a helmet, the goggles on top. The smell of him is terrible. He is burned, terribly burned. His face is a sticky black mess from which only the eyes, white and staring, protrude. The sleeves of his jacket have burned away, exposing blackened flesh, the claw-like hands. How can he stand, let alone walk? His breath is a rasp.

I start forward. I mean to reassure him that I can help, though God only knows what I can do. Surely he cannot live with those burns? But at my first movement, he turns and actually runs into the undergrowth.

Tears are running down Evie's face. I fold her in my arms and for a moment neither of us say anything. I am not sure what we have just witnessed.

I lead Evie shaking back to the house where her mother puts her to bed. She seems in a state of shock. I stay with her all the rest of the day.

'You are going to miss your train,' her father warns me.

'But Evelyn...'

'You can do nothing more for her,' he tells me. 'She is in good hands.'

I leave Midford on the next train

turn to 30

I decide to stay another day to get to the bottom of this mystery

turn to 47

22

'Robert! It's me, Peter! Hold your fire!'

'Show yerself!' I do not recognise the voice, but it is certainly not Robert's. 'Come out with yer 'ands up.'

I surrender

turn to 31

I remain hidden

turn to 54

I try to get in the back of the house

turn to 85

23

As I struggle with George, the gun goes off accidentally. 'Evie! No!'

She gives a little cry as she falls. I rush to her side and cradle her head in my hands. She stares up at me in surprise, her face very pale, her eyes distant.

'Am I going to die?'

Even a cursory glance tells me there is no hope. She is already failing. Her parents kneel beside her, Alice weeping quietly, George begging his daughter to forgive him. Robert alone remains aloof. He paces up and down the room, hands clamped over his ears, as if he were being tormented by the cries of the dead. I turn my eyes away from her for only a moment but when I

I think I can stop this	turn to 60
It is hopeless, I must get out of London, to Midford	turn to 15
I think first of Helen's safety	turn to 70

27

At five to ten, the butler reappears and shepherds us all into a darkened room at the back of the house. If there are windows, they have all been covered by black drapes. The only light comes from a small oil lamp positioned at the centre of a large circular wooden table. There are thirteen seats around the table, at one of which Lady Sylvia has already taken her place.

She is wearing a black evening dress that leaves her white arms bare. The folds of the dress expose a narrow triangle of flesh whose point lies somewhere between her breasts. The combination of black fabric and pale skin draws particular emphasis to the gold amulet or **charm** that hangs at her throat. Her hair is very long, very straight and dressed with a net of gold; *And upon her head a crown of twelve stars*. She is Isis, Diana, the High Priestess of the Major Arcana. She nods politely to all the guests as they file round the table to take their seats but offers no one her hand. These are laid flat on top of the table, long fingers splayed out as if they were oracular bones ready for her inspection.

The butler comes in and turns the lamp down low. The light is now sufficient only to illuminate the circle of the table; the rest of the room and our own faces are in darkness. We are instructed to join hands.

'Whom shall I call?' Lady Sylvia asks.

I call out ' Samuel Walsh '	turn to 96
I wait to see what will happen	turn to 3

28

'You'd like to know, eh?' he says, and I can't forgive him his mocking tone. He has found my weak spot and pressed his finger upon it. But I ignore his gibe and persist.

'It must have been awful...'

'Being a hero?' He laughs bitterly. 'Oh, it was terrible! Do you know how irresistible women find a hero? Poor Helen just couldn't compete.'

'Robert...'

'Everyone telling me what a fine fellow I was, hanging that wretched cross about my neck. I sold it, you know. It was worth nothing to me. None of it was worth anything.'

I am shocked by his disillusion. 'Tell that to the dead.'

'Do not speak of them!' he says, half rising from his chair in sudden agitation. His voice trembles and I realise that he is very drunk.

I hold up my hands in a gesture of surrender. 'I meant no offence.'

Robert subsides, his anger deflating as suddenly as it has blown up.

'No,' he mutters. 'No, the dead are nothing. Dust, dust and shadows.' He is rambling, I think, lost in the drink. But he fixes me suddenly with clear eyed conviction. 'Life, that's all there is.' He smiles, a ghastly perversion of good humour, and raises the bottle. 'Carpe diem. Carpe bloody diem.'

I say nothing. It is terrible to see him like this. He lowers the bottle, wipes his mouth but leaves the taste of bitterness on his lips. 'If you want to hear war stories you should go and speak to old

man Wytherington. You'll find him at the In and Out, talking to anyone who will listen. He could talk the hind leg off a donkey. You'll be on crutches by the time good old Withers has done with you.'

I decide I will go and speak to Colonel Wytherington turn to 94
I ask him about **Samuel Walsh** turn to 50

29

'What on earth do you want a spade for?' George Cantlow asks.

'To lay the dead to rest, I must first dig something up: the spell which has brought them back to life.'

'A spell?' Alice laughs nervously. 'Do you mean magic?'

'Ancient magic that would better have remained lost forever. Sir Clifford Osborne rediscovered it, Lady Sylvia made use of it – and Robert stole it from her for his own ends. He has buried it with Evie's cat as a sacrifice to the dead.'

Evelyn bursts into tears. 'Poor Sixpence! Where is he?'

I remember Robert's hateful story, the casual cruelty with which he related it. *Buried him on the west side of the greenhouses where his immortal soul wouldn't trouble the gardener.*

'But this can't be true,' Alice says, a note of desperation in her voice. 'Robert?'

'It is all true,' he admits, with a ghastly smile. 'And I applaud Joyce for uncovering my crimes – you are quite the **detective**, my old friend.'

'But why Robert? Why did you do it, boy?'

Turn to 64.

30

The branch line service connects with the London train at Bath. I arrive with minutes to spare and jump into the first available carriage. The express pulls out of the Georgian spa town in a cloud of hot water vapour. Then the engine whistle sounds and we roar into the long night of Box tunnel. I catch sight of my reflection in the darkened window; another, smaller, Peter Joyce making his own journey, seemingly suspended in air and smoke; and I reflect for a moment on those curious German superstitions regarding a man and his double. What fate has overtaken Robert Cantlow? And what part must I play in it?

Choose one of the following OBJECTIVES for Peter:

HAUNTED

I believe my old friend to be haunted by his experiences during the War. I will find out his story and help him if I can.

HEART OF DARKNESS

There is something sinister about Lady Sylvia Osborne. I am sure that she is at the heart of his darkness.

SWEET HELEN

I will honour my obligations to the Cantlows but in truth I care not so much for their son as for the woman he has cast aside. My only concern is to make her happy.

It is ten o'clock before the train reaches London. The western sky is still light even now but a vast pall of darkness hangs over the city, like some horror that threatens to forever extinguish the lamps that burn there. I take a cab to my lodgings, where the air, bottled up over the weekend, is hot and stale. The pages of my novel lie on the table but I am too tired to work on the manuscript and fall gratefully into bed and the arms of a deep and dreamless sleep.

Move the DAY forward 1. The morning paper is full of Ireland, and the arrangements for the Peace Celebrations to be held this coming Saturday. So many have come to London to honour the fallen that it is now practically impossible to engage temporary accommodation of any kind. Over breakfast I decide that I will call on...

Robert	turn to 44
Helen	turn to 8
Lady Sylvia Osborne	turn to 81

31

I step out into the street, my hands raised above my head. 'My name is Peter Joyce.'

The window of the apartment is opened and a man in army uniform leans out.

'Yer not dead?'

'No thanks to you.'

'Well, 'urry up and get inside.'

As I hurry across to the front door, the soldier looks up and down the empty street, evidently fearing that the army of the dead will choose this moment to launch another attack.

Turn to 63.

32

'Then why are you here? Are you from the press?'

She stands up and, as if this were some silent summons, the gaunt butler appears in the doorway.

'I believe we have nothing more to say to each other today. But if you will come here tomorrow evening at ten, you may witness one of my séances at first hand. Afterwards we may continue this conversation in a somewhat different vein.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to attend the séance at Lady Sylvia's house. Because the séance will not take place until the evening, he may also visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8), or go to the British Museum to research Sir Clifford Osborne's archaeological excavations (turn to 88) on the same day. When you arrive at the next instruction to 'Move the DAY forward' it will be time to attend the séance. Make a note of the reference to turn to (24), as you will not always be given this option in the text.

33

As I describe what happened, I notice a flicker of alarm, perhaps even of fear, pass across Robert's face.

'He was a living, breathing man?'

'He was breathing,' I tell him, 'and as much flesh and blood as you or I. But we both know that he was dead.'

'Dear God,' he mutters. If before he only swigged from the bottle because it was there, he now drinks in real earnest. A trickle of red wine runs down over his stubbled chin.

He trembles and I think that he is on the verge of confessing something. I have no idea what it is but I fear that it will be terrible. But at the last moment he draws back from the precipice and masters himself.

'Very well,' I say quietly. 'Keep your counsel; I shall not press you. But if you are mixed up in some evil, I pray that you will have the courage to confess it to me.'

I lay my card on the table next to all the bottles so that there should be no doubt of my address. I do not expect that I will receive a visit but I hope. I put on my hat and bid him good day.

Robert watches me do all this without speaking. But at the last, as I am already going out the door, he calls my name, so that I stop and turn on the threshold and look back. His stricken expression begs me not to reproach him. When he speaks, his voice is little more than a whisper.

'You can't know how it was out there, Peter. You can't know how it was.'

There is nothing more. I turn upon my heel and leave.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Helen (turn to 8) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

34

I wait until Miss Veale has left the room before mentioning Robert's name.

'Must you bring that up?'

'I am very sorry that he has hurt you, Helen, believe me I am. But he is not himself, I am convinced of it.'

She does not understand when I ask her if he has changed.

'Of course, it was Robert! He said he didn't love me anymore. He told me that I couldn't understand him, that none of us could. No one who hadn't been in the War.'

'And *she* can?'

She begins to cry quietly.

'Did he say anything else? Anything unusual?'

'He kept talking about some stupid promise he had made. I reminded him that he had made a promise to me once but he became angry and said it wasn't the same thing at all.'

'A promise? To whom?'

'To one of the soldiers in his regiment. A man who was killed in the fighting.'

'Who was he? What was his name?'

'Samuel somebody or other. I don't really remember.'

'Please try, Helen. It could be important.'

'Welch, I think, or Walsh. Yes, it was Walsh.'

'Did he say what he had promised this **Samuel Walsh**?'

'No.'

'He must have given some clue.'

'Peter, please.'

Helen's aunt comes back into the room then. She sees my frown, her niece crying her eyes out, and promptly decides that the visit is at an end.

'Can't you see that you are upsetting her?' Miss Veale scolds, closing the door behind me. She hustles me out of the house and forbids me to return. But perhaps Helen has already told me what

I need to know.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

35

There is a banging at the door as many fists hammer on the heavy oak timbers. Glass shatters somewhere down below and then we can hear the clatter of furniture being overturned. The dead are in the house.

Alice screams. George rushes out onto the landing, clutching the fatal shotgun. I hear its deadly bark, the angry cries of the dead as they stumble over the bodies of their fallen comrades. I know there are too many of them for one man to hold back alone but it is no use; I cannot leave her. I remain on my knees, cradling the head of the girl I had loved so briefly. In death, she is no less beautiful. O Evelyn, this is not real, this never happened!

When I look up we are alone. Robert has gone, I know not where. Nor do I care. I can hear George cursing like a trooper as the dead pull him down and dismember him. It is only a matter of time now. Her body is still warm. I hold her close and we prepare to face them together.

36

'Not even you!' she cries. 'It's so unfair!'

'You'll meet someone, Evie,' I say, as levelly as I can, 'and turn his head. You'll fall in love and get married.'

'Oh I never shall! All the decent men were killed. Everyone else is horrid, horrid!'

She turns away from me and I catch at her arm.

'Evie! What did Robert do to you?'

'Horrid!' she repeats. She shakes free of my hand and starts to run back towards the house. I watch her go but make no attempt to follow.

The plane stutters overhead. Smoke starts to come from the engine in a thin black trail. It dives and disappears behind the trees beyond the lake.

I hurry on, as fast as I can, into the woods. The sun slants through the trees, creating patches of sunlight and shade. I can't see or hear anything of the plane. Perhaps, after all, it didn't crash? Perhaps the pilot managed to pull out of the dive and restart the engine or glide to safety. Then I hear the sound behind me, a rasping breath, and a terrible stench fills my nostrils. Before I can turn fully, the thing gives a low animal snarl and rushes towards me.

I am bowled backward and hit the ground. The impact knocks all the air out of me. And then the thing is on top of me, claws outstretched to tear at my face.

The fight takes place in one or more phases as follows:

1. Roll two dice; the total represents the thing's attack in this phase.

If Peter is to fight back, you must roll less than this total.

To defend himself, you must roll more than this total.

2. Decide whether Peter will be fighting back or defending himself in this phase (the choice is yours. If the first total was low, Peter is more likely to defend himself but there is nothing to stop him making a reckless attack. Make a note which.)
3. Now roll two dice again and compare the totals.

It is a frenzied attack. There is nothing human left in him; he is a beast that seeks to tear me limb from limb. Somehow I fight him off and run back to the house, pushing Helen inside.

'Peter? Oh God, you're bleeding!'

I bolt the kitchen door just before the handle is tried.

'We must lock and bolt all the doors,' I urge.

Then the pain of the wound kicks in and I slump against the door.

Lose 1 LIFE. If Peter is still alive, turn to 72.

40

The Captain tells me frankly that his CO is far too busy to speak to anyone at present, least of all a mere civilian. 'In case you hadn't noticed, sir, we are being invaded. Step back please.' I must do without the help of the Army.

But it doesn't matter; I think I can stop this myself.

turn to 60

I decide to flee to Midford by stealing an army truck

turn to 84

41

Sylvia Osborne is reputed to be in her thirties and is, by all accounts, a very striking woman. She seems to fascinate every man she meets. She married the celebrated Egyptologist Sir Clifford Osborne, a dusty old relic more than twenty years her senior, after a whirlwind romance that surprised his closest friends. If there is some doubt about her history before she met Sir Clifford she has now fully assumed the role of his wealthy widow. I am handed a picture of her, which Alice has snipped from a society magazine in vindictive rage. It shows a pale face, eyes closed, beneath an ornate headdress, doubtless an allusion to the Egypt of Nefertiti and Cleopatra. Robert, it seems, is cast in the role of the hapless Mark Anthony.

'You will help us, won't you Peter?' Mrs Cantlow pleads.

Before I can answer, Evie, Robert's younger sister, comes bounding up and asks if I will play badminton with her. When I last came to Midford, Evelyn Cantlow was 13, an awkward, and faintly annoying, schoolgirl. I think I hardly spoke one word to her. Now she has blossomed into a very pretty young woman.

I am glad for this diversion

turn to 17

I assure Alice that I will do what I can

turn to 91

42

When I come to my senses, it is evening and I am in my bedroom at the Grange. Everyone wants to know what happened in the wood and I have to tell them – I am not sure.

My sleep is punctuated by nightmares and I am glad when the cool light of morning relieves me of my watch at hell's gate. *Move the DAY forward 1.*

They would like to keep me here longer while I recover. But nothing could keep me in Midford after that experience, nothing, not even the tender ministrations of Evelyn Cantlow, dabbing at my wounds with disinfectant and laughing as I flinch at the sting.

At lunch I insist on getting up and by evening I am waiting on the platform at Midford Junction for the last train to London. Turn to 30.

dreadful crack.

That blow would have killed any living man. But James Frobisher is already dead and is merely irritated. He turns his fury on me, striking me across the face. I fall back, stunned, the poker slipping from my hand. And then he is upon me, his nails ripping and tearing at my face and neck. He is too strong, I cannot fight him off.

Lose 1 LIFE. If Peter is still alive, turn to 9.

49

'Let me see that!'

Robert's voice is so insistent that I hand him the amulet unquestioningly. He turns it over quickly in his hands, as if he were searching for damage or some hidden mark. As he does so, his fingers trigger a delicate hinge mechanism and the amulet springs open, like a beetle spreading its wings for flight.

'This will not stop them,' he tells me flatly. 'Do you see? The papyrus is missing.'

The hollow compartment inside the amulet is empty.

George Cantlow's gaze shifts from the amulet to his son and a frown creases his already troubled face. 'What do you know of this, Robert?' he asks sternly.

'The incantation,' his son explains. 'The power to raise the dead rests with the papyrus and not the amulet. This, this is just a useless shell.' He flings it to the floor in a sudden petulant gesture and bursts into tears. Turn to 64.

50

'Do you intend to keep your promise to this fellow Walsh?'

'What do you know about that?' he asks, somewhat sharply, and I think I have touched upon a nerve.

'Only what Helen has told me.'

He snorts. 'I might have guessed she would blab. That's what sickens me about this country, people always think they have a perfect right to poke their noses into a chap's personal affairs.'

'If it is a secret then you should have kept it to yourself.'

'Oh, it's no secret. I'll tell you all about it if you like, though I really don't see that it is any concern of yours.'

'He's dead isn't he?'

'Yes, he's dead all right. I sometimes ask myself why it was that I was allowed to live when so many others were not. Sam and I were both caught in no man's land during a bombardment and fate saw to it that we took cover in the same shellhole. We were not exactly friends before but, let me tell you, there is nothing like spending a day under enemy fire for getting to know a man. I told him everything, things I had never told another living soul before – not even you. I told him all about Helen and Midford and my family. Sam didn't have a family as such, though he spoke very fondly of his mother. The father had run out on her before he was born and she had later married a much older man. I promised that I would visit her if he should be killed in the fighting, and he promised to do the same for me.

'Sam never made it back, of course, a sniper got him. Shot through the eye; he probably didn't even realise he was dead. He fell back into the crater and his one good eye came to rest on me – he had very clear grey eyes – and so we lay there until nightfall.'

'Dear God.'

'I do not think there is a God or, if there is, he does not hear our prayers. But I have kept my promise to Sam, that and certain other promises I made that day. And that is all I intend to say on the matter.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Helen (turn to 8) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

51

I do not know if she really believes me. But she tells me that a séance will be held here at ten o'clock tomorrow evening. Each guest must bring a 'gift' to the table. She runs through her scale of charges with practised professionalism; for twelve shillings I may form part of the circle. For a guinea, I may ask a question of the departed.

'Until tomorrow then,' I say, shaking her hand.

'Until tomorrow,' she agrees. Her eyes watch me as I leave the room and follow the cadaverous butler out to the front door.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to attend the séance at Lady Sylvia's house. Because the séance will not take place until the evening, he may also visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8), or go to the British Museum to research Sir Clifford Osborne's archaeological excavations (turn to 88) on the same day. When you arrive at the next instruction to 'Move the DAY forward' it will be time to attend the séance. Make a note of the reference to turn to (24), as you will not always be given the option in the text.

52

Move the DAY forward 1.

When I go outside for an early morning walk, I see Evie Cantlow down by the lake and change my direction to join her. She is poking at something in the reeds with a stick and does not look up until I am almost upon her.

'Oh, it's you,' she says, rather dismissively.

She's wearing a summer dress and a white wool cardigan against the chill. I suggest we walk by the lake a little and she agrees. She carries the stick for some time, then throws it away.

I hear the drone of an aeroplane. I have to stop and shade my eyes against the morning sun to see it; a big two-seater, a military aircraft. The blue, white and red roundels stand out on the pale wings. I can't think which aerodrome it has come from.

'Aren't you going to kiss me?' Evie asks at last.

I look at her and she stares back, defiant. 'Isn't that why you asked me to walk with you?'

I take her in my arms

turn to 80

'Actually,' I confess, 'it was to find out what Robert did to you.'

turn to 36

53

If Peter is looking for a buried treasure, he will need to know where to dig. The names of the people or things buried should suggest two numbers. Add those numbers together and turn to the paragraph with the same number as the total.

57

My myriad plans for the day are defeated by the unseasonable weather and a persistent pain in my foot. We stay at home, play cards and reminisce about old friends. After dinner, Helen reads aloud from a little volume of Keats, reciting the verses in her slow, dreamy voice. We are sitting together at the table when I see the face of a **dead man** through the window.

James Frobisher is still wearing his battle dress. A piece of shrapnel has punctured his steel helmet; streaks of blood and crusted gore trail down to mix with the mud on his face. He peers into the lighted room with apparent curiosity, more like a passerby than a lost soul, as if he merely wishes to see if anything has changed while he has been away. But there are no eyes in the empty sockets. Mercifully, Helen is sitting with her back to the window and does not see him. But she senses my unease because she stops reading and looks up.

‘What is it?’ And then she stands and turns, her voice excited. ‘It is Jim, isn’t it?’

But he is already gone, as suddenly as he appeared. I tell her that...

I am going out into the garden turn to 39

we must lock and bolt all the doors turn to 72

58

She invites me to have a seat and takes one herself, folding her hands in her lap. The cats swarm at her feet. She asks me if I have ever attended a séance before and, when I confess that I have not, she begins to describe her dark art, speaking as coolly and dispassionately as if she were talking about the weather. She has a precise voice, very clear and agreeable to listen to. The séances always take place as a group; we will sit around the table, holding hands, while she questions the spirits of the departed. They will answer with her voice. She asks me who it is that I wish to contact.

The question takes me unawares; stupidly I did not consider this beforehand. As I hesitate, my mind invents the older brother I never had. In a matter of minutes, he assumes a name and a history, a nebulous spirit taking shape before our eyes.

If she knows I am lying, she does not indicate it. She asks a series of questions about dear departed Nick (of course, he was killed in the War), which seem designed to establish his biography. This, I suspect, is the established practice of fraudsters. Then she asks if I have any questions of my own.

I ask how she came by her powers.

She indicates the portrait above the fireplace.

‘My late husband, as you may know, was a professor devoted to uncovering the mysteries of old Egypt. A fascinating culture, with a deep respect for death and the afterlife. In the ruins of a mortuary temple below the pyramids he initiated me into the secret ways which one may use to consult the spirits. That very night, he called up the shade of one who had been dead these four thousand years, and, through me, asked her to name the bounds and precincts of the temple in which we sat. His subsequent excavations proved her answers to be correct in every measurable respect; she had, in addition, given him much valuable information which the spade alone could not have deduced.’

‘It must have been very strange to hear a dead woman speak through your lips.’

She looks at me and smiles. ‘You do not believe in me, do you Mr Joyce?’

‘I think your powers are very real.’ turn to 68

‘No’, I say flatly, ‘no I don’t.’ turn to 32

breaking branches, a terrible smell and then I almost stumble across her.

'Evie? Thank God!'

She is lying on her back in the undergrowth. Her white cardigan is flecked with black soot. She moans and I can see that her cheeks are scratched, grimy scars that flame red even as I crouch at her side. She is barely conscious and I have to carry her back to the house.

It is a slow and painful progress. They see us as we come to the bottom of the lawn and rush out to meet me. Willing hands relieve me of my burden.

'What in God's name happened?' George Cantlow demands.

And I have to tell him – I am not sure. I leave Midford on the next train and return to London (turn to 30).

63

I realise that the man is no soldier but a demobilised serviceman, wearing a coarse suit made from an old uniform. His name is Pettitt – 'though *he* called me Friday.'

'Where is Mr Cantlow?'

'He's scarpered. He said 'e was goin 'ome.'

'To Midford?'

'If that's where 'is family lives.'

Robert has left nothing behind but the refuse of his excesses and this man, his former servant in the army.

'Did he ever mention the dead?'

Pettitt grimaces. 'He 'ad a mortal fear of them, that much I know. "The dead are not gone," 'e told me once, when 'e was lost in the drink. "I can always hear their voices". He'd forgotten it come morning but I 'members it well for the words made me shudder. They was 'aunting 'im if you ask me.'

'What about Lady Osborne?'

'Oh, that one! I think it was all over between 'em. They had a fearful row on the blower last night. I could tell she was put out when I answered and sure enough they was soon at it hammer and tongs. Mr Cantlow, he says 'e 'as buried it.'

'Buried what?'

'If you don't know, sir, I'm sure I don't. Knittercross, I think 'e said. He'd buried Knittercross an' the cat as a **sacrifice**. Or maybe the cat was Knittercross.' Pettitt scratches his head. 'Funny name for a cat, though, ain't it? I might've thought more of it but then 'e decided 'e was off 'ome, wanted me to pack everything there and then – he wouldn't wait for the morning. Never seen 'im in such a hurry, like 'e 'ad Old Nick 'isself at 'is heels. Though now I wonder if 'e didn't know they was coming back.'

I wish Pettitt good luck and make my way

to the house of Lady Sylvia Osborne turn to 37

to Midford Grange turn to 15

64

'You think I am a hero,' Robert says bitterly. 'I am nothing of the sort. I have been living a lie and it has killed me.'

'Whatever can you mean. Your medal...'

'A worthless piece of shrapnel. Oh, I've seen your little shrine and I despise it! We lost four

as any arrival; he can smell the engine grease, hear the slam of the carriage doors; but this train appears in no timetable and its passengers have no earthly right to be here. They are the men who died for their country, the ones who never lived to see England again. The cleaner has time enough to pity these poor boys their still gaping wounds before their cold, dead hands close about his old neck and wring the life from it.

A fierce hatred seems to animate this army of the dead. They swarm out from the station into the unsuspecting streets, their wild eyes regarding the familiar sights of home with undisguised contempt, as if these were the landmarks of some conquered city. While a victorious Nation still sleeps, the soldiers are across Westminster Bridge and up Whitehall to Charing Cross, tearing down the flags and the wooden Cenotaph erected in their honour. Below Big Ben they encounter a few MPs who have been up all night debating the coalfields of Upper Silesia and the Saar, dividing the spoils of war. The dead fall upon these luckless representatives of the class that failed them so completely and butcher them without mercy.

I wake to the sound of gunfire. I dress quickly and go downstairs. My landlady, Mrs Minifie, is standing in the hall, in her dressing gown, looking down the street.

‘What is going on?’

‘The parade,’ she murmurs. ‘It must be something to do with the parade.’

But the gunfire that sounds from the direction of the Kennington Road is no rifle volley. The shooting is sporadic and I am far more inclined to agree with an indignant city gentleman and his muttered talk of ‘socialists’.

For a crowd is gathering. Faces appear in windows and doorways; the more adventurous set off to find out what is really happening and I limp along with them, this growing band of the curious and excited.

The first appearance of the soldiers gives rise to a spontaneous cheer, for there is nothing in these times so certain to awaken the national spirit as the sight of men in uniform. But something is wrong. They form no orderly column such as we are accustomed to seeing, marching five abreast to the tune of the band, but come on at a run, stumbling forward, arms outstretched as if to clear a path.

The cheering dies away; I hear someone gasp, another moans, as if in pain. For all must have seen what I now see: the sightless eyes, the mouths burned and blistered and coughing blood. These are the victims of a gas attack. A howl of rage and hatred issues from the dead throats, a hideous battle cry that is answered by screams of terror.

*If you have written the password **dead man** in your Notebook, turn to 26.*

Otherwise, turn to 83.

66

The dead are upon me before I have even gained the stairs. The sergeant pulls me down and I feel an agonising pain as his claws rake my back, tearing at me like a wild animal.

Roll two dice to see if Peter manages to escape without more serious injury. The total required depends on the number of dead soldiers remaining (i.e. whether he was unarmed or had one or two bullets left):

3 9 or more

2 8 or more

1 7 or more

*If the total is less than the number required, Peter must lose 1 LIFE.
If he is still alive, turn to 46.*

67

It is clawing at my eyes. Dear God, get it off me! It bends forward and actually bites into my shoulder. The pain lends me strength and I manage to push my assailant to one side.

It can only be the pilot or the observer of the plane. I can see the remains of a helmet, the goggles on top. The smell of him is terrible. He is burned, terribly burned. His face is a sticky black mess from which only the eyes, white and staring, protrude. The sleeves of his jacket have burned away, exposing blackened flesh, the claw-like hands that reach for me.

I pick up a branch and smash it across the face with all my strength. The blackened head almost caves in on one side but the thing does not fall, only wavers, and in that instant I run, run with a desperation I have never felt before.

I do not know at what point it stops chasing me. I only know that when I reach the lawn it is not behind me and I am able to gain the relative safety of the house.

'Dear God, you're wounded,' George Cantlow says, as I fall into his arms.

It is then that I realise that I am bleeding, bleeding fiercely from the deep bite on my shoulder. There are deep scratches on my face and arms. And over everything the smell, the sickening stench of burned flesh.

Lose 1 LIFE and turn to 42.

68

She continues to smile but evidently does not believe my protestations. 'Why have you really come to see me, Mr Joyce?'

I insist that I am interested in a séance turn to 51

I mention the **dead man** turn to 10

I ask her about her **charm** turn to 98

69

I reach Midford around noon. The village is quietly going about its business, blissfully unaware of the horrors taking place just over the horizon. I drive straight through without stopping and continue up to the Grange, where the Cantlows receive me with open arms and exclamations of joy.

'He is here,' Alice says, squeezing my hand.

'Robert? But where is he?'

'Upstairs resting. He arrived very late last night.'

I insist on seeing him at once, despite all Alice's protestations that he will be sleeping. He is not asleep, nor even in bed, but pacing up and down the room like a caged animal. He looks as though he has not slept a wink. His face is pale and haggard, his eyes dark circles. 'Hullo Joyce,' he says flatly. 'What brings you here?'

As briefly as I can I tell them all of the dreadful events unfolding in London. The Cantlows are appropriately horrified and bombard me with questions.

'But they can be killed?' George asks again, as if to assure himself of this comfort.

72

'But, Jim....

'H, please, just do as I say.'

Something in the tone of my voice, some undercurrent of fear, silences her questions. We work together to lock the doors and fasten the windows, exciting the indignation of Helen's aunt, who has been sewing quietly in the parlour and resents this sudden fuss. But even as we slide the last bolt home, we hear the crash of breaking glass, followed by a shrill scream, abruptly silenced. The windows of the parlour have given way.

There is only one ready weapon in sight, a heavy iron poker. I snatch it up and, holding it before me like a sword, push open the door of the room. Helen throws her hands to her face to stifle the cry that must otherwise come.

Miss Veale has fainted. She lies sprawled beside her overturned chair, her sewing all in disarray. James Frobisher stares blindly at the body, swaying gently from side to side. In the bright light of the room, his awful wounds are plain to see but his expression is one of puzzlement rather than pain. It is as if he cannot believe that he is here or, having returned, no longer recognises his old home.

'Jim?' Helen's voice is nothing more than a whisper. 'Oh God, your eyes!'

He does not reply but I know that he must hear her because he turns slightly towards the sound. I change my grip on the poker, transforming it from sword to deadly club. Helen sees my movement and puts a restraining hand on my arm.

'Peter, no! Let me talk to him!'

She thinks the thing before her really is her dead brother. She takes a step forward, causing him to stir and raise his head. Oh Helen, be careful!

I watch her take another step towards her brother, hand outstretched

turn to 48

I leap forward between them, striking down at the thing

turn to 20

73

In the next moment, the wave of the dead breaks against the walls of the house. They are hammering at the door now, their fists pounding on the heavy oak timbers. Robert turns to me, his eyes wild. I think his sister's death has snapped something deep inside.

'Look, Joyce, it's too late for me. But you can still save yourself. Save them.' He nods towards his parents, still crouching over Evelyn's dead body. 'Break the spell.'

'What must I do?'

'The papyrus calls them back. The dead man knew. He told me how his mother had used the spell to raise spirits from the grave – and what I must do to bring the dead themselves back to life. God help me, I did everything he asked to save my own miserable skin. You will find an urn buried on the west side of the greenhouses. You must dig it up and destroy it. That and everything inside.'

Glass shatters somewhere down below and then we can hear the clatter of furniture being overturned. It is too late. The dead are in the house.

Roll two dice. If you roll a double, luck is on Peter's side; otherwise, he must lose 1 LIFE before managing to escape the house. If he is still alive, turn to 99.

74

'So you know all about that, do you?' He hesitates. 'Look, Joyce, we were friends once weren't we? Well, take some friendly advice and stay away from Sylvia Osborne. Her powers are very real.'

'You mean she really can summon the dead?'

'Oh, I know it sounds like rot! I didn't believe it myself until I heard her speak with Sir Clifford's voice. Yes, she called up her dead husband and he told me everything. It was him, you see, who found the papyrus and deciphered the spell; she keeps it rolled up inside the golden amulet she wears during her séances. That's what gives her power over the dead.'

Peter has achieved the OBJECTIVE Heart of Darkness.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Helen (turn to 8) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

75

The streets of Earl's Court are eerily quiet, though here and there are testimonies to wild scenes. I come across an abandoned milk cart, the horses butchered as they stood in their traces. I do not dare to look for the driver. As I approach Robert's house a pistol shot rings out, causing me to dive for cover; someone is shooting at me from the window of his apartment.

I call out my name	turn to 22
I remain hidden	turn to 54
I try to get in the back of the house	turn to 85

76

The butler takes down a copy of Ebers' *Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* and removes a long key from the hollowed out pages of the book. As I watch, he moves aside the portrait of the young man to reveal a small wall safe. It contains a jewellery tray on which is laid a golden pendant. Some kind of amulet? As the butler locks the safe, I take a closer look; the pendant is fashioned in the form of a scarab, the sacred symbol of ancient Egypt, although the metalwork looks considerably more modern. Before I can examine it further, the butler ushes me politely but firmly back to the lounge (turn to 27).

77

The force of the shotgun blast knocks Robert back off his feet. He groans once and then lies still. Alice Cantlow lets out a terrible shriek and rushes to her son's side. Evelyn bursts into tears.

'Is he dead?' George asks, lowering the shotgun.

He is not dead. He moves, coughs blood. With his mother's help he manages to sit up. He touches the wound in his chest then stares at his bloodstained hand in amazement. I think he is in shock. His face is pale, his breathing uneven. But he rises to his feet with an incredible effort and faces his father, taking a step towards him.

George Cantlow fires the second barrel. At this range, he cannot miss. The shot tears away the right side of Robert's face but this time he does not fall. His ruined face manages a parody of a smile. 'Third time's the charm.'

But there is no third barrel. Before George Cantlow can reload, his son has crossed the space between them and fastened his bloody hands around the older man's neck.

'Do something Peter!' Evelyn screams. 'He's killing father!'

I shake myself free of the daze. My hearing is still dulled by the roar of the shotgun as I launch myself against Robert.

The battle takes place in one or more phases as follows:

1. Roll two dice; the total represents Robert's movement in this phase.

For Peter to make a successful attack, you must roll less than this total.

If he is to defend himself successfully, you must roll more than this total.

2. Decide whether Peter will be defending himself or attacking in this phase (the choice is yours. If the first total was low, Peter is more likely to defend himself successfully but there is nothing to stop him making a reckless attack. Make a note which.)
3. Now roll two dice again and compare the totals.

If Peter was attacking (you guessed the second roll would be lower) and the total of the second roll is lower than the first, he wins the battle but if it is the same or higher, his attack fails and Peter loses 1 LIFE. If he is still alive the battle continues from step 1.

If Peter was trying to defend himself (you guessed the second roll would be higher) and the total of the second roll is higher than the first, he succeeds but if it is the same or lower, he loses 1 LIFE. In both cases, the battle continues from step 1.

If Peter wins the battle, turn to 16.

78

I am surprised at myself. I had thought, when she announced her engagement to Robert, that I had buried that particular emotion, buried it deep. But this business has caused it to flare up again, as if it had all happened yesterday.

I still care deeply for Helen and find I am angry with Robert for making her wretched and unhappy. But perhaps I should also be grateful to him for giving me a second chance? I am a different man from the tongue-tied student of five years ago. Might I not finally say the words I could never say? *Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.*

I tell the Cantlows that I should leave soon. I plan to catch the evening train back to London. Alice objects and says I should stay another day with them at Midford. She tells me that Evie will be glad of my company.

I thank her for her hospitality and agree to stay	turn to 52
I insist on catching the evening train	turn to 30

79

The photograph is a portrait of a pale young man wearing Arab dress, a European playing at being a son of the desert. A handwritten dedication at the bottom corner reads WITH LOVE, SAM. When I reach to take the picture down, I find that it conceals a wall safe. There is a keyhole in the

82

The other guests are so engrossed in their chatter that it is easy to slip away unnoticed. I find my way into the library and scan the shelves for anything interesting. There is a comprehensive range of archaeological publications, many of them written by Sir Clifford himself and focusing on excavations in Egypt. There are some works which straddle the boundary with the occult, commentaries on the Book of the Dead and such like, but nothing with a real whiff of sulphur and brimstone about it. I turn away from the shelves. There are a couple of red leather armchairs arranged beneath a framed photograph of a pale young man wearing Arab dress. I assume at first that this must be Sir Clifford himself in his younger days but the handwritten dedication at the bottom corner reads WITH LOVE, SAM. A large earthenware pot stands on a small side table; I lift the lid and peer inside. It is empty.

'Acker-know-pick-char,' the butler informs me in funereal tones, his sudden appearance making me start guiltily.

'I'm sorry?'

'A Canopic jar, sir. They held the internal organs of the deceased.'

'Oh.' I replace the lid quickly.

Turn to 76

UNLESS you have written the password **suspicion** in your Notebook, in which case the butler will assume that Peter is up to no good and ask him to leave the house at once - move the DAY forward 1. If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65. Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8).

83

The crowd breaks and runs. I am too slow, I am in everyone's way. In their blind rush to escape, someone crashes into me, sending me sprawling. I try to get up but am knocked back to the ground. I am being trampled underfoot.

Lose 1 LIFE. If Peter is still alive, turn to 38.

84

I am inside one of the parked trucks before anyone notices. Only when the engine coughs into life is my act of theft spotted. By then I am already pushing the monster into gear and jamming my foot down on the accelerator.

I ignore the soldiers waving me down. As I crash through a checkpoint that had only just been constructed, the sentries open fire, shattering the glass of the cab.

Lose 1 LIFE. If Peter is still alive, turn to 69.

85

Another shot rings out as I break cover, but it is the last; the unseen sniper evidently assumes that I am running away. My foot pains me now. I hobble only as far as the next junction, where a side street gives access to the gardens at the rear of the properties. The back door of Robert's house opens onto a dingy stairwell; one flight leads down to the coal cellar, another to the floors above. But I have only set foot on the lowest step when a man in uniform appears above me, pistol in hand.

I raise my **revolver** and fire
I leap back into cover

turn to 43
turn to 2

86

London is too dangerous. I must get Helen and her household to the relative safety of the countryside and I can think of no better place than Midford Grange. There, at least, a warm welcome awaits.

No trains are running west. A crowd of desperate civilians has gathered at the entrance to Paddington station but is being kept back by the Army. The soldiers seem dazed; they have come to London expecting to parade through the streets and must now build barricades across them. Eight months after the Armistice they find themselves once more under attack. What will happen, I wonder, if they come face to face with a fallen comrade?

For now, though, there is discipline and some semblance of order. I entrust Helen, her aunt and the maid to the care of a captain who seems to be organising the civilians. That is the best I can do for now. But their safety will not be guaranteed unless the dead can be stopped.

I decide to seek the help of the Army
I think I can stop this myself

turn to 40
turn to 60

87

I open my hand to reveal the **scarab** (turn to 49).
(If Peter was relying on his **revolver** to stop the dead, turn to 11).

88

The British Museum houses the archives from Sir Clifford's Egyptian expeditions. The shelves of the underground storerooms are lined with box after box of potsherds, of crumpled excavation plans and handwritten journals. Somewhat daunted I tell the curator that I will start with the material from Gizeh.

It is dry work. I have the feel that I am re-excavating the tombs and temples, sifting through the detritus of dead centuries. And then, amidst all the muted earth tones, I come across a splash of watercolour, a small box of paintings. Here is the famous silhouette of the three pyramids, utterly unremarkable save for the initials at the bottom right: SJO. I sift through the little collection of postcards and scrolled papers, turning them now this way, now that. I imagine her sitting in the shade of a palm tree to paint the Arab workers engaged amongst the heaps of spoil, little smears of white and brown in the wash of sand. But it is the face that commands my attention, a cool female face rendered pale blue against a navy background. Her eyes are closed, the artist has not bothered to add the detail of her hair. The picture has the aspect of a death mask; very likely this is an illustration of some statue or tomb painting that Sir Clifford had excavated. Or – and I experience a little frisson – perhaps it is the portrait of *one who has been dead these four thousand years*. The Greek letters in the corner read Νιτωκρις. Was this the woman's name?

In the Reading Room, I research what I can of Nitocris, a queen of the Sixth Dynasty. There is little enough to find and much of that uncertain. She is said to have raised the third pyramid at Gizeh but the few mentions of her name are all of a much later date. Several authors consider her to be purely legendary. Herodotus, never the most reliable of sources, tells a story that she had invited her enemies to an underground feast and then caused the banqueting chamber to be flooded, drowning them all. Centuries later, she was invoked by Greek magicians for her

supposed necromantic powers. A footnote points me towards Papyrus B23. I find the latter listed in the monumental *Corpus Ptolemaica*. The catalogue entry, which I dutifully copy out, reads as follows:

XXIII. *Nitocris Papyrus*. Language: Greek. Date: 2nd century BC. Magical formula for raising the spirits of the dead. 260mm x 45mm. (Osborne, C., 1902, Two magical texts in the Alexandrine tradition)

If Peter has been invited to attend a séance, turn to 24.

Otherwise, move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8).

89

The gun sounds devastatingly loud in the confined space. With each report, one of the fiends is jerked off his feet, hurled backwards by the force of the speeding bullet. I make sure that none will move again, then kneel by the side of their unfortunate victim.

She is almost insensate. The lace of her night dress is stained with her own blood and muddied by the boots of her tormentors. Blood runs down her arm in brown streaks, and collects in the small hollow at the base of her throat.

I do what I can for her, though I fear that every effort is in vain, that she has already lost too much blood. She opens her eyes and I see a spark of recognition there.

‘Thank you.’ Her voice is a rasp, the effort of speaking makes her cough and choke. I urge her not to try again – the wound at her neck is too grievous. She reaches for something on her bedside table; her diary, the pages closed about a pen. I bring them to her. In a shaky hand, she scrawls two words – ROBERT and ΝΙΤΩ – across the days. And then Lady **Sylvia** Osborne enters the realm with which she is so familiar.

I go to find Robert (turn to 75).

BUT if Peter has already been to Robert’s flat, it is now too late to try again – the capital is being overrun by the dead. His only remaining hope is to get out of London, to the safety of Midford Grange. Turn to 15.

90

‘Do you think I give a jot about that?’ he asks scornfully.

‘What did you do to her?’

‘Oh this is a good story. Friday should hear this. Friday! Are you there?’

The little man comes back in. As I suspected he has only been in the next room. Now he looks at his master, waiting to see what is expected of him.

‘You remember my little sister Evelyn? Well, you don’t, of course, but you’ll remember me speaking of her. When I got back from France, I found she had a cat called Sixpence. A silly name for a cat; I should not have given a farthing for the beast. It was really just a bag of fleas.’

All this is spoken to Friday, who listens obediently. Now Robert turns to include me in the story.

‘Did you know, Peter, that the ancient Egyptians believed the cat to be a sacred animal? They even used to mummify the things, pop them in jars and bury them.’ He pauses for a moment. ‘So

Lady Sylvia takes a packet of cigarettes from a drawer and lights one. ‘They were serving in the same regiment when Sam was killed. Robert promised my son that he would bring me back a few keepsakes, nothing more. If we have stayed friends, it is because we take comfort in each other’s company. When Robert talks of Sam, he makes me feel that my son is still alive. And I, I understand death in a way that few other civilians can. Shall we be denied these small comforts for the sake of propriety? You may tell that to his concerned family.’

Suitably chastened, I bow and bid her good day - *move the DAY forward 1.*

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8). Alternatively, he may try to secure an invitation to one of Lady Sylvia’s séances (turn to 71).

93

‘A spade?’ George Cantlow asks, sounding puzzled. ‘Why?’

‘There is something buried here,’ I tell the elder Cantlow, ‘and Robert is going to tell us where it is.’

He looks up then. I half expect him to deny any knowledge of the sacrifice but he merely smiles sadly.

‘Did she tell you?’

‘No,’ I say. ‘Pettitt did. What have you done, Robert?’

‘Something terrible.’

‘Then undo it.’

‘I cannot,’ he says and buries his face in his hands. ‘It will be the end of me.’

‘Robert?’ Alice Cantlow kneels beside her son and clasps his arm. At her touch, he bursts into tears. Turn to 64.

94

Colonel Wytherington commanded Robert’s regiment during the war. The old soldier has entrenched himself at the In and Out, where he is now so secure in his position it would take an army to dislodge him. The In and Out is the popular name for the Naval and Military Club in Piccadilly, so called from the signposted gateways on either side of the entrance. I meet with the Colonel in the foyer, beneath the large painting of the Rally at Balaclava. Colonel Wytherington remembers Robert Cantlow with affection and is more than happy to answer my questions. There is no doubt in his mind that Robert is a hero.

‘My God, sir, of course I remember Cambrai – I am not likely to forget it in a hurry! Fuller had his toys out of the box, four hundred of the new tanks, and wouldn’t rest until he had been given the chance to play with them. And we were among the lucky chaps who were chosen to go along for the ride.

‘The Hun called it the Siegfried-Stellung because they thought it was invulnerable. We were supposed to drive a sword into its one weak spot, the ridge above Bourlon Wood. The devil’s own job to get up that hill – the 62nd hadn’t managed it in three days’ fighting – but we did it, by God, we did it and not a bloody tank in sight.

‘Well, of course, their artillery really let us have it then. They fired sixteen thousand shells into that wood in one day. One day! Major Locke was killed, along with two of his captains; Cantlow was only a lieutenant then but he took charge, held his battalion together when their infantry came at us. The men said he was absolutely fearless, acted as if he were immortal. His example inspired

the rest and we clung on. He deserved that DSO; would have got the bloody VC if I had had any say in the matter. A brave man, sir, a very brave man.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Helen (turn to 8) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81).

95

After tea, I suggest that we walk upon the Heath, for the views of the city are glorious and the air will do her good. I could bite my tongue for letting slip that she looks so tired and ill but Helen does not seem to notice and both she and her aunt are agreeable to my plan. For of course the old woman must come too, toiling along behind us like a shadow. But when we reach the top of Parliament Hill, a little breathless from the exertion, I see that the shadow has fallen away and come to a halt, staring mournfully, and no doubt reproachfully, up at us.

'H, I have something I really must say to you.'

A mistaken beginning, I think – too portentous. She puts her hand on my arm to silence me. Has she already guessed what I am trying to say? But it seems that she has not really been listening after all, that all the time I have been looking for the right words she has been far away in her own thoughts. When I turn to her, her eyes are bright.

'Jim has come back.' Her voice is low but excited.

It is a moment before I realise that she is talking about her dead brother.

'You have... seen him?'

'A week ago. I happened to look out into the garden and there he was. And, oh Peter, you must believe me! He is not dead! Isn't it wonderful?'

I am not sure. 'Did he say anything?'

'There was no time. I thought I must have seen a ghost but he was not like those ghosts that one reads about. He was as real and vital as that man over there.' He is standing some distance from us, his face turned towards the city. I can hear him pointing out the dome of St Paul's to the small boy at his side. 'And then I saw him again, from my room. He came and looked up at my window. I think he just wanted to let me know that he was there.'

I think about that.

'You do believe me, Peter, don't you?'

'I do, really I do.'

'I knew you would. You will think it silly of me but when I heard that you were coming to tea, I thought: first Jim, now Peter!'

'Ah, I never died...'

'And nor did Jim! Don't you see? There must have been some terrible mistake, one man identified as another!'

I pause. I have been entrusted with a dream, a fragile thing, as bright and brittle as cut glass. I am conscious of a dull pain in my foot and wish that I could sit down. 'Why did he not come forward then? What is he waiting for now?'

'Don't you think I have asked myself the same question? I think he has been ill. He has had shellshock or lost his memory. He needs time to remember – just as we need time to get used to the fact that he is not dead. I think if she saw him now, the shock would kill my poor aunt. But hush, here she comes...'

There is no other opportunity to discuss James Frobisher's strange homecoming for I understand

perfectly well that I am not to speak of the subject before Miss Veale. The fact that Helen and I are once again sharing secrets is a source of deep joy to me, even if I find the nature of the secret itself disquieting.

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, Peter has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Lady Sylvia (turn to 81), if he has not already done so. Or he can pay another call on Helen (turn to 57).

96

The circle appears visibly disquieted by my interruption; this is not part of the script for the evening. Lady Sylvia's eyes snap open and she fixes the table with a look of cold fury. Medusa herself might have had kinder eyes.

'Who dares call that name?' she demands, her voice trembling with emotion.

No one speaks but my neighbours turn towards me accusingly and there is nothing for it but to confess my fault. Lady Sylvia flushes quickly and then all the colour drains from her face, leaving it a mask of white bone in the lamplight.

'There is no one here tonight by that name,' she declares at last, in a strained voice, as though it were a great effort for her to speak. Then she stands up, abruptly announcing that the séance is at an end before rushing from the room.

A murmur of discontent spreads around the table. The butler reappears and turns on the lights, revealing a group of angry and disappointed guests. But the anger is directed not at Lady Sylvia but at me. I have disturbed the rite and so disappointed all their hopes.

As we are going out, Howard Phillips takes hold of my arm and steers me to one side.

'What possessed you to call on her son?' he asks angrily.

'Her son!'

'You did not know?'

'How could I? His surname...'

'He did not carry Sir Clifford's name because he was not Sir Clifford's son.' Phillips nods significantly. 'There are shadows around every candle flame.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8).

97

All are in darkness. As I peer into the library, my gaze is returned by a pair of luminous eyes, cold and unearthly. Something comes running towards me and I start back, suddenly afraid – but it is only one of Lady Sylvia's Siamese cats. It slips past my legs and runs out into the hallway. The rest of the brood are hiding in the shadows. I enter the library and

scan the books on the shelves	turn to 25
examine a heavy earthenware pot on a side table	turn to 59
study a portrait photograph hanging on the wall	turn to 79

98

Lady Sylvia regards me with some **suspicion**. 'Good day to you, Mr Joyce.'

Move the DAY forward 1.

If it is now Saturday, or Peter has already visited all three homes, turn immediately to 65.

Otherwise, he has time to visit Robert (turn to 44) or Helen (turn to 8). Alternatively, he may try to secure an invitation to one of Lady Sylvia's séances (turn to 71).

99

The dead have gathered at the front of the house and do not notice as I slip out by the kitchen door. I can hear more gunshots as I search through the gardener's shed, frantically pushing aside the clutter until my hands light upon a long-handled shovel. Hefting it over my shoulder, I skirt round the walls of the house until I come to the greenhouses. There are two of them, long and low, with a large compost heap at the far end. Mixed with the sweet smell of rotting vegetation is another, ranker smell – the dead stench of bodies bloated after long hours in the water. There is not much time.

The place I am looking for should lie to the west. I scuff away the weeds, looking for signs of recent disturbance. When I think I have found the spot, I begin to dig.

Robert didn't bother to make the hole very deep. Almost the first cut of the shovel slices away the top of an earthenware pot; scooping in the dirt with my hands, I uncover the broken fragments of the lid. Further excavation reveals the outlines of a large urn. I dig impatiently around the edges until finally I am able to lift it free of the surrounding earth. Then and only then do I look inside.

The urn contains the badly decayed remains of a small cat. Between its paws, like a favoured plaything, is Robert's Distinguished Service Order. And wrapped around the medal's ribbon is a long, thin strip of papyrus densely covered on both sides with small letters in the Greek alphabet. The ink has faded, the language is so obscure that even my classical education can do no more than decipher a few words.

I bring the shovel down on the ghastly collection of objects gathered at my feet. The first blow almost shears the dead cat in two. The strip of papyrus frays and tears. I strike again at the ragged remains, crushing and splintering them. The spell is broken.

I let the shovel fall to the ground with a hollow clang, suddenly conscious that it is the only sound. The dead have disappeared, leaving nothing more than a foul taint on the breeze. Yet they have taken their vengeance. A single cry rises from the house, a thin piercing wail of anguish. When I go back inside I find that Robert Cantlow is dead. *Turn to 100.*

The aftermath

(with optional scoring system. Score for any of the following words in bold type recorded in your Notebook. The maximum score possible is 100pts).

Britain would never forget the men who had been killed in the service of their country – or how close their revenants had come to destroying it. Peter Joyce had the quiet satisfaction of knowing that he had helped to avert a national disaster (+25pts), a knowledge that was even more satisfying if he had done so by use of clever **detective** skills (+15pts). If he also achieved his chosen OBJECTIVE, award yourself another +25pts. But what happened next?

Robert Cantlow was buried in the graveyard of the little church at Midford. His grieving parents told the well-wishers at the funeral that he had succumbed to an old war wound that had never fully healed. In many ways, it was true.

Peter Joyce laid a few flowers on the grave and then left Midford to begin a new life with one of two women:

EITHER he married his **true love** Helen (+25pts) and started a family. Their first child, James, was born in 1920. They lived happily ever after in one of the new homes being built in the suburbs.

OR he entered into a turbulent relationship with **Evelyn** (+10pts; but if SWEET HELEN was Peter's OBJECTIVE then **subtract 10pts**). Robert's sister moved to London where she became a Bright Young Thing. Their rows were legendary.

If he ended up with neither, he at least had the comfort of a quiet life (so award yourself +5pts). Without other distractions, he was finally able to finish his novel, which was published in 1922 as *The Sacrifice*.

He still writes. And occasionally, just occasionally, the hairs on the back of his neck will stand up on end as Lady **Sylvia** (+10pts) glides through the room on a cold draught, reminding him that death is not

THE END