

# Journey's End



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF R.C. SHERRIFF

Robert Cedric Sherriff was born in 1896 in Hampton Wick, Middlesex. Upon finishing school in 1914, he began working in his father's insurance office, working as a clerk until World War I. Sherriff served in the East Surrey Regiment, fighting in several notable battles until he was finally injured in 1917. At this point, he returned to his original line of work, acting as an insurance adjuster for ten years. During this period, he began to write plays, drawing upon his wartime experiences in works like *Journey's End*, his most famous and celebrated artistic effort. First produced in 1928, *Journey's End* attracted widespread critical acclaim and enjoyed a long run in London. After this success, Sherriff attended New College, Oxford in the early thirties, where he was part of the Royal Society of Literature and the Society of Antiquaries of London. During his lifetime, he composed eighteen original plays, wrote fifteen film scripts, and even published several novels.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Journey's End* is a play about World War I, which began in 1914 and lasted until 1918. The conflict itself was set off when Franz Ferdinand, the archduke of Austria, was assassinated by a Yugoslavian nationalist attempting to upset Austro-Hungarian rule. As a result of this assassination, many European and Asian countries were swept up in a war that escalated quickly due to past years of international tensions and political allegiances. Although the war itself was too complex to fully cover here, suffice it to say that the two major players were the countries that made up the Allies (including France, the British Empire, the Russian Empire, the United States, and Italy, among many others) and the countries that made up the Central Powers (including Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria, among others). In the end, the Allies won, leaving Germany and Austria-Hungary to bear the major brunt of the loss. Both Russia and the Ottoman Empire, for their part, withdrew from the war before it ended. *Journey's End* takes place during the final year of the war. More specifically, the play elapses over the days leading up to the Battle of St. Quentin, which began on March 21st and marked the beginning of Operation Michael, a German offensive attempt to advance through Allied lines in order to seize control of British supply points in the seaports of the English Channel. Although the German forces wreaked havoc on the Allies and gained significant grounds, they eventually ran out of supplies and men before achieving their goal. This failure signaled the downturn of the Central Powers, who were ultimately defeated eight

months later.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although the novel has more fighting and action than *Journey's End*, Erich Maria Remarque's [All Quiet on the Western Front](#) is similar to Sherriff's play because of its interest in exploring not only the absurd brutalities of war, but also the moments of quiet anticipation that characterize prolonged conflicts. Published just one year apart, the two texts look at different sides of World War I, and taken together, readers can begin to understand that the emotional experience of war is rather uniform, regardless of the country for which a soldier fights. Indeed, both *Journey's End* and [All Quiet on the Western Front](#) explore what it feels like to wait for something (terrible) to happen—a theme that also surfaces in Samuel Beckett's 1954 play, [Waiting for Godot](#). Although [Waiting for Godot](#) is not expressly about war, it still examines the existential thoughts that arise when someone must pass the time. In [Waiting for Godot](#), Estragon and Vladimir wait for a man named Godot, but can't remember why, exactly, they are doing so; nor do they know what will happen when Godot arrives. Similarly, the characters of *Journey's End* wait for the Germans to attack, but they don't know precisely what this attack will be like. As they pass the time, they begin to see the cycles of action and inaction as seemingly interminable, thinking that no matter what they do, the war will go on in a pattern of alternating calm and chaos. In this way, *Journey's End* and [Waiting for Godot](#) are alike, as both plays make use of anticipation to create a sense of futility and existential uncertainty.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Journey's End*
- **When Published:** *Journey's End* was first produced on December 9th, 1928
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Drama, Realism
- **Setting:** A military dugout in the British trenches of St. Quentin, France during World War I.
- **Climax:** After days of mounting tension and anticipation, the Germans finally stage a massive attack on the British trenches, seriously overwhelming Stanhope's infantry and fatally wounding Raleigh.
- **Antagonist:** The Germans are the most obvious antagonists in *Journey's End*, but they hardly ever actually appear in the play. Because of this, the threat they pose—the sense of doom that hovers over the British dugout—becomes the true antagonistic force.

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Rowing Club.** R.C. Sherriff composed and staged his first play in order to raise money for Kingston Rowing Club so that the organization could purchase a new boat.

**The Big Screen.** Since it first premiered, *Journey's End* has been staged many, many times. In 2018, though, it was adapted as a feature film for the first time.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the first scene of *Journey's End*, Osborne arrives in the British trenches of St. Quentin, France in the last year of World War I. He is the second-in-command of an infantry stationed only 70 yards from the trenches of their Germany enemies. The nature of this kind of military service is quite intense, so the infantries rotate working this location, each group taking six-day shifts. When Osborne arrives, he has a brief conversation with Hardy, the second-in-command who has just finished his six days. Hardy tells Osborne there is a German attack expected to come soon, and the two soldiers talk about Stanhope, the captain of the infantry. Stanhope is a hard-drinking young man who has been in the war already for three years. Hardy exalts Stanhope as both a sound leader and a prolific drinker. Hardy also tells Osborne about an officer who recently left, and he hopes that the replacement will be a better, braver soldier.

When Hardy leaves, Osborne sits down to a dinner made by Mason, the officers' cook. At this point, Raleigh, the new officer, enters. As Osborne and Raleigh talk, Raleigh reveals that he knows Stanhope from before the war. He and Stanhope went to the same high school, and Stanhope was a respected rugby captain whose father was friends with Raleigh's father. The boys spent summers together, and Stanhope started dating Raleigh's sister. When Stanhope went off to war, Raleigh thought constantly of him as brave captain. When Raleigh enlisted, he even asked a relative to help him get assigned to Stanhope's infantry. Hearing this, Osborne realizes he should warn Raleigh that Stanhope has changed. Next the two men talk about Raleigh's journey through the trenches to the front lines, which he says was an unnervingly quiet experience. Osborne confirms that it is "often quiet" there, despite it being one of the most dangerous places to be stationed. Osborne says they are just "waiting for something" to happen.

When Stanhope enters the dugout, he's stunned to see Raleigh. Rather than embracing him, he simply asks how he got here. He then turns his attention to Osborne and Trotter, another officer, and the group sits down to eat together. Eventually, the fourth officer of Stanhope's infantry, Hibbert, enters and claims that he doesn't know if he can eat because of his neuralgia. This obviously annoys Stanhope, who urges Hibbert to eat, but Hibbert goes to bed. "Another little worm trying to wriggle

home," Stanhope says.

During dinner, Trotter decides to make a **chart** representing the remaining hours until he and his fellow officers can leave the trenches. On a paper he draws 144 circles, intending to fill them in as the hours pass. By the end of dinner, only Stanhope and Osborne remain in the dugout, and Stanhope is exceedingly drunk. He admits that he's afraid Raleigh will write to his sister—who's waiting for Stanhope to return—and tell her about his drinking. Stanhope declares that he's going to censor Raleigh's letters, and Osborne puts his drunken friend to bed.

The following day, the Colonel informs Stanhope that the long-awaited German attack is set to take place on March 21st, in two days. Stanhope relays this information to Osborne, who says he's glad something is happening at last. Stanhope then muses on his experience in the trenches and worries that he's going crazy. Osborne assures him he's merely experiencing "nerve strain."

Raleigh enters the dugout with a letter, and Stanhope tells him to leave it open so it can be censored. Raleigh says that he hasn't said anything confidential, but Stanhope angrily insists that he follow orders and allow his letter to be censored. When Raleigh leaves, Stanhope asks Osborne to read the letter, only to discover that the boy has said only positive things about him.

Later that afternoon, the Colonel tells Stanhope that the higher-ups have decided to stage a raid on the German trenches before the attack on the 21st. To Stanhope, this sounds like a suicide mission, but the Colonel insists that it must be done, and the two men determine that Osborne and Raleigh should be the ones to lead the effort. After the Colonel departs, Hibbert enters the dugout and tells Stanhope that his neuralgia has progressed so badly that he believes he must go home. This enrages Stanhope, who pressures him to stay and even pulls a gun on him, though he doesn't shoot. Finally Hibbert makes it clear that he doesn't truly have neuralgia. Rather, he can't stand the war. Stanhope becomes more sympathetic, telling Hibbert that he too feels this way. He reveals that the only thing keeping him from faking sick and going home is drinking.

The next day, the Colonel and Stanhope go through the plan for the raid: Osborne and his men will launch a smoke bomb at a section of German fence. Raleigh and his men will slip through the fence, grab the first German soldier they can find, and take him hostage so they can gather info about the attack. Stanhope and the Colonel then visit Osborne and Raleigh, who are preparing for the mission. When they leave, Osborne and Raleigh wait to begin, sitting together at a table and trying to pass the time. Eventually, they talk about where Raleigh grew up. In the minutes before they leave, they continue to bond.

The raid goes successfully, and they kidnap a young German soldier. This pleases the Colonel, but Stanhope soon learns Osborne has been killed. Like Stanhope, Raleigh is stunned by

the loss, but the Colonel has to strain to show his emotion, as he's primarily excited to pass on news of the successful mission. When the Colonel finally leaves, Stanhope and Raleigh look at one another as gunfire sounds overhead.

That night, Stanhope, Trotter, and Hibbert get drunk on champagne, which the Colonel and other officials provided as a reward. Hibbert drinks more than he normally does, and tells Stanhope that Raleigh isn't celebrating with them because he's with the soldiers on watch. This enrages Stanhope, and when Raleigh comes into the dugout, he asks why he would eat with the sergeants rather than the officers. Raleigh admits he couldn't imagine feasting and partying on the day of Osborne's death. He asks how Stanhope can do so, and Stanhope yells, "To forget! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?"

The next morning, the officers are hungover when the German attack begins. Stanhope and Hibbert are in the dugout, and Hibbert tries to delay leaving. Eventually, Stanhope gets him into the trenches, but he himself remains. Soon Raleigh is injured and brought into the dugout. At first, he's in such shock that he doesn't register how badly he's been hurt. Shortly thereafter, though, he realizes he can't move his legs, and he starts calling Stanhope "Dennis." In turn, Stanhope calls him "Jimmy" and tells him he'll stay by his side. Stanhope goes to get a candle, and when he returns Raleigh has stopped talking. A soldier enters and tells Stanhope that Trotter wants him to join them in the trenches. Stanhope stares at Raleigh's lifeless body, and then climbs the steps of the dugout. Moments later, a shell explodes nearby, snuffing out the candle by Raleigh's side.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Stanhope** – The Captain of an infantry company stationed in the trenches of St. Quentin, France during World War I. Stanhope is a young man, but he has already seen three years of combat and has gained the respect of his men, who see him as a brave leader. But they also see him as something of an alcoholic. Indeed, the war has changed him greatly, turning him from a rugby captain and school hero into a hard-drinking man with shot nerves who can drink an entire bottle of whiskey, stumble to bed, and wake up and command an infantry the next morning. Osborne, the second-in-command, admires Stanhope like everyone else, but he recognizes the toll the war is taking on him, suggesting in a conversation to Hardy—another officer—that Stanhope's drinking has perhaps become too much of a spectacle in the trenches. "When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit," he says. When a young officer named Raleigh reports for duty, Stanhope doesn't know how to respond, since he knows Raleigh from before the war. Indeed, Stanhope was Raleigh's role model at school, and the two boys

even spent summers together because their fathers are friends. What's more, Stanhope is romantically involved with Raleigh's sister, who's waiting for him after the war. Because of this, Stanhope is weary of Raleigh, as he thinks Raleigh will write letters to his sister and tell her that he (Stanhope) is a drunken mess. Still, though, he does nothing to change his behavior, continuing to drink at all hours of the day—a practice he eventually admits has to do with his fear of war, saying that he only has two choices: either he must fake sick and get out of the war entirely, or he has to get drunk enough to be able to ignore his crippling fear.

**Raleigh** – A young officer fresh out of school. Raleigh went to the same school as Stanhope, who is several years older than him. As such, he has always admired Stanhope—so much so that he asked a high-ranking relation of his to help him get placed in Stanhope's infantry. When he arrives in the trenches and sees Stanhope once more, though, he's surprised to find his role model significantly changed. Whereas Stanhope used to be a strapping and optimistic man, now he is a war-worn alcoholic who treats Raleigh with the same gruff indifference he shows all the other soldiers. Nonetheless, Raleigh remains eager and good-natured as he becomes accustomed to life in the trenches. What surprises him most, he tells Officer Osborne at one point, is how calm and quiet everything is at war. When Raleigh is selected to carry out a very dangerous raid on the German trenches, he doesn't balk. In fact, he's flattered to have been chosen. Thankfully, he survives, but Osborne—who helped him lead the raid—doesn't, and this fundamentally changes Raleigh, making him somber and sad. Whereas the other officers (including Stanhope) celebrate the success of the raid by drinking heavily and eating fine foods, Raleigh decides to stand watch with lower-ranking soldiers. This infuriates Stanhope, who asks why Raleigh would rather be with the soldiers than with the officers, and Raleigh tells him that he couldn't possibly enjoy such a hearty meal knowing that Osborne's body still lies somewhere out there in the fields. Later, when the Germans finally attack the British trenches, Raleigh is badly injured, and Stanhope stays with him until the end, finally dispensing with the formality of calling his friend by his last name. "Is that better, Jimmy?" he asks, but Raleigh has already shut his eyes forever.

**Osborne** – The second-in-command to Stanhope. Osborne is a bit older than the other soldiers, but he is well-liked. In fact, he actually helps keep Stanhope—his superior—psychologically grounded, making sure to take care of his friend when he's gotten too drunk. In many ways, Osborne serves as a fatherly figure to a number of the officers in Stanhope's infantry, talking to them about the nature of war and giving them advice about how to make the best out of trying circumstances. For instance, he tells Raleigh to see enemy combat lights (called Very lights) as "romantic" in the way they light up the sky. This, he intimates, will help young Raleigh maintain a healthy perspective and

some peace of mind. Still, Osborne is not without his own doubts, as he himself has trouble seeing the point of the war. At one point, he reads a passage of *Alice in Wonderland* aloud to Trotter, who says, “I don’t see no point in that.” In response, Osborne says, “Exactly. That’s just the point.” This, it seems, can be applied to the war itself, which keeps going on and on without actually changing. After every bombardment, soldiers like Osborne sit and wait for the next thing to happen—and the cycle repeats. Unfortunately, this cycle is finally broken for Osborne when he dies in a dangerous raid the day before the Germans stage a massive attack on the British trenches.

**Hibbert** – An officer in Stanhope’s infantry. Hibbert is so afraid of dying in the trenches that he pretends to suffer from an acute case of neuralgia (intense nerve pain). He seizes every opportunity to talk about his physical pain in front of Stanhope, finally approaching the captain and claiming that he will have to go home on account of this overbearing condition. However, he’s caught off guard when Stanhope tells him he *can’t* leave and says that he isn’t allowed to go to the doctor, either. When Hibbert presses Stanhope, he discovers that Stanhope is tired of soldiers faking various illnesses in order to excuse themselves from duty. During this conversation, Hibbert grows more and more hysterical, until finally he admits that the real reason he wants to leave is because he can’t stand the stress and fear that comes along with being at war. To his surprise, Stanhope actually begins to empathize with this sentiment, revealing that he too feels this way. From this point on, Hibbert stops complaining of neuralgia, forming an unlikely bond with Stanhope, who helps him through by boosting his confidence and agreeing to work watch shifts with him. When the Germans finally stage their massive attack, Hibbert seems intentionally slow to join the fighting, but he eventually leaves the safety of the dugout to face the enemy.

**Trotter** – An officer in Stanhope’s infantry. Trotter is jovial, irreverent, and gluttonous, frequently giving Mason—the cook—a hard time about the food served in the dugout. Although Trotter provides primarily comedic relief in *Journey’s End*, he also taps into an important element of the play’s thematic material by creating a **chart** that outlines the remaining hours he and his fellow officers have to spend in the trenches before going back to a safer, more removed area. Each time an hour passes, Trotter blackens one of the 144 circles he has drawn on the piece of paper, thereby making the passage of time more tangible than it might otherwise seem in the tense atmosphere of the trenches.

**Hardy** – The second-in-command officer stationed in Stanhope’s trenches before Osborne and his group take over. Before Hardy leaves, he overlaps with Osborne so that he can “hand off” the duties and fill Osborne in on anything he might need to know before his six-day shift. Hardy is a good-natured but rather sloppy man who can’t wait to vacate the trenches—so much so that he leaves them dirty, failing to clean

them like he’s supposed to. While “handing off,” he and Osborne talk about Stanhope, and Hardy expresses his admiration for the man’s ability to drink large quantities. He also suggests that Osborne should be the one leading the infantry, but Osborne brushes this off, saying that he’d “go to hell with” Stanhope if he had to.

**Mason** – The officers’ cook. Mason is very obedient, constantly trying to accommodate the often ridiculous requests of people like Trotter, who have unrealistically high culinary expectations. Still, Mason strives to provide the officers with the best possible service, experimenting with his cooking techniques in order to produce the best quality food. Unfortunately, his efforts often go unnoticed, and the officers talk behind his back about the problems with his food.

**The Colonel** – Stanhope’s immediate superior. The Colonel is the one who tells Stanhope to expect the large German attack on March 21st. He is also the person who informs Stanhope of the high-ranking generals’ decision to raid the German trenches before the attack. Stanhope, for his part, thinks this is ill-advised, and even the Colonel seems to have his doubts, but he does nothing to undermine his orders. Instead, he soberly instructs Stanhope to organize the raid, helping him come to the conclusion that Osborne and Raleigh should be the officers to lead it.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Sergeant-Major** – A large man who ranks below Stanhope and his officers. The Sergeant-Major makes sure that all of Stanhope’s orders are carried out.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## FRIENDSHIP AND HUMAN INTERACTION

In *Journey’s End*, R.C. Sherriff showcases the effect of war on personal relationships. In particular, he focuses on how wartime power dynamics and interpersonal attitudes alter the ways people interact with one another. This is most recognizable in Stanhope and Raleigh’s friendship, which suffers because of the various stressors of military life. For the majority of his young adult life, Raleigh has looked up to Stanhope, a classmate who eventually goes off to war and becomes a captain. While Stanhope is off in the trenches of World War I, Raleigh stays behind and finishes school, all the while worshipping Stanhope as a hero. Later, when Raleigh joins



the military, he is placed under Stanhope's command. But although he's ecstatic to join his hero's infantry, he soon discovers that his relationship with Stanhope will be quite different during wartime. Not only has the war taken a significant toll on Stanhope's wellbeing, but his high position in the military also forces him to treat Raleigh with rough indifference. In this way, Sherriff suggests that human companionship is highly contextual, something that grows according to the emotional circumstances that define the immediate environment. Like human beings themselves, then, relationships aren't fixed or unchanging, but dynamic and adaptive.

When Raleigh first reports to duty as an officer in World War I, he's overjoyed to have been assigned to Stanhope's infantry. He knows Stanhope from before the war, when the captain was a rugby hero several years his senior. Raleigh and Stanhope got to know each other and developed a friendship of sorts during the summers, since their fathers were friends. Stanhope also became romantically involved with Raleigh's sister, who is now waiting for him to return from the war. Since this period, Raleigh has looked up to Stanhope and imagined him as a valorous captain. But what he doesn't know is that, while Stanhope is indeed a well-respected soldier, he has also turned into a gruff and pessimistic alcoholic.

Upon arriving in the trenches, Raleigh speaks with Osborne—the second-in-command—and learns of Stanhope's transformation. Osborne is fond of Stanhope, but he also recognizes that the war has had a harsh effect on him. He warns Raleigh that he shouldn't expect his relationship with Stanhope to pick up where it left off. "You mustn't expect to find [Stanhope]—quite the same," he says, and then suggests that Stanhope has become "quick-tempered." Raleigh brushes this off, saying, "Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! the roof nearly blew off." Raleigh doesn't seem to grasp that Stanhope has changed, instead assuming that his old friend, who has become an alcoholic, is still someone who would lose his temper over catching his subordinates drinking. Raleigh's conception of Stanhope is based on a frame of reference that can't effectively be applied to the current circumstances. After all, the way Stanhope interacted with people as a boarding school role model has little in common with how he must now act as a military captain trying to command soldiers in the trenches.

Osborne, for his part, picks up on Raleigh's naïve assumption that he'll be able to approach his relationship with Stanhope the same way he used to. "You must remember he's commanded this company for a long time," Osborne says of Stanhope. "It's—it's a big strain on a man." Osborne tries to emphasize that people change according to what's happening in their lives—and if a person changes, it follows that their relationships will also change. Stanhope himself seems to understand this,

which is why he's unhappy that Raleigh has been assigned to his infantry; he knows he has changed for the worse, and he comprehends that this means his relationship with Raleigh will most likely change for the worse, too. Speaking to Osborne soon after Raleigh arrives, Stanhope says, "Didn't you see him sitting there at supper?—staring at me?—and wondering? He's up in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand."

Of course, there's another reason Stanhope doesn't want Raleigh to "understand" how he has changed: he fears Raleigh will write to his sister and tell her how wretched Stanhope has become. To ensure that this doesn't happen, he decides to censor Raleigh's letters. When he tells him his plan to do this, their tense conversation shows how these new wartime circumstances have altered the way they interact. "D'you understand an order? Give me that letter!" Stanhope says. "Dennis—I'm—" Raleigh sputters, but Stanhope cuts him off, saying, "Don't 'Dennis' me! Stanhope's my name! You're not at school! Go and inspect your rifles!" This exchange exemplifies how both Stanhope and Raleigh struggle to navigate the new terms of their relationship.

By examining the painful transformation of Stanhope and Raleigh's relationship, Sherriff makes it clear that friendship and human interaction is greatly dependent upon the surrounding interpersonal context. However, while relationships are certainly fluid and adaptive, Sherriff suggests that there *are* certain bonds that are more resilient than others. Osborne proposes this idea to Stanhope, assuring the captain that, though his relationship with Raleigh may indeed change, this doesn't necessarily mean the war will completely ruin their connection. "I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you," Osborne says, "There's something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship." Although Raleigh certainly notices how the emotional and psychological effect of the war has influenced both Stanhope as an individual and Raleigh's relationship with Stanhope, his admiration of the struggling captain will enable him to "go on liking" him. In this way, Sherriff shows readers that just because human relationships change according to their surrounding circumstances doesn't mean they aren't also resilient. Though trying environments—like those presented by war—force people to adjust the way they interact with one another, this doesn't have to ruin what lies at the core of a relationship. In the final scene of *Journey's End*, Stanhope treats the gravely injured Raleigh with gentleness and care, and the audience sees that these two men have maintained their connection even if the context of their relationship has profoundly shifted. With this, Sherriff advances a nuanced take on human interaction, one that allows for both change and constancy.



## ANTICIPATION, EXPECTATIONS, AND UNCERTAINTY

Perhaps the most challenging thing the soldiers in *Journey's End* face isn't violence itself, but the *threat* of violence. Although their trenches are situated only 70 yards from their German enemies, the majority of their time is spent in nervous anticipation. In the long hours—and even days—between bursts of combat, the soldiers are left to grapple with their fear, which grows in intensity when the battlefield is calm. Indeed, most of *Journey's End* focuses on moments of calm, suggesting that the psychological elements of fighting a war can be just as harrowing as the physical elements. Above all, this fretful sense of constant waiting comes as an unpleasant surprise to soldiers like Raleigh, who had expected war to bring with it a constant barrage of violence and action. The fact that the *lack* of activity so unsettles the soldiers suggests that expectations play an important role in the way people deal with and prepare for difficult situations; having come ready to face constant violent action, Raleigh finds himself psychologically unprepared for the quiet of the battlefield. Then, suddenly, he has to face intensely violent moments, and once those end, he has to settle into waiting again. By putting this cycle of inaction and action on display, Sherriff suggests that there is no true way to prepare for war, which is simultaneously calmer and crueler than anything a soldier could ever imagine.

When Raleigh first arrives, he doesn't know what to make of the seemingly tranquil atmosphere in the trenches. "It's—it's not exactly what I thought," he tells Osborne, "It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny." It's clear he's disoriented by the fact that the war doesn't adhere to his expectations. He "thought" the war would be a hectic, dangerous endeavor at all times, but now he finds himself in a relatively peaceful situation, and he doesn't know what to make of this discrepancy. Osborne, on the other hand, is a more experienced soldier who understands that this odd quiet is characteristic of most war zones. He points out that the Germans are probably "sitting in *their* dugouts" and also "thinking how quiet it is." Still, Raleigh remains disturbed by the fact that the battlefield is so different than what he had in mind, and this ultimately reinforces the idea that knowing what to expect is an important part of staying psychologically grounded during wartime.

The sense of anticipation in the trenches also unnerves Raleigh because the seeming tranquility only further emphasizes all the bad things that *could* happen. "It seems—uncanny," he says to Osborne, still referring to the calm that presides over the battlegrounds. "It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something." Whereas one might think Raleigh would be glad the battlefield is quiet, the "uncanny" calmness of the trenches only makes him dread the possibility of violence all the more. Forced to spend his days passing the time with bated breath, he feels as if he's "just waiting for something" terrible to happen.

This, Osborne tells him, is simply the nature of war. "We are, generally, just waiting for something," he says. "When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again." Saying this, Osborne tries to teach Raleigh to predict the very unpredictability of war. The only thing a soldier can know for sure is that he *can't* know for sure when something bad is going to happen—only that something bad *will* happen. Osborne shows Raleigh the cycle of inaction and action that characterizes military combat, trying to get the young soldier to see "waiting" as an unavoidable part of war.

Despite the fact that they can never know what to expect (and when to expect it), Raleigh's fellow soldiers try to give themselves a sense of control—or order—over the passage of time. For instance, Trotter sketches out a **chart** full of 144 circles, "one for each hour of [the] six days" that he and the others have to spend in the trenches before retreating again to safety. Crossing off the circles one by one gives Trotter the feeling that he is somehow actively participating in how the time passes. Once he breaks the days down into smaller measures of time, everything suddenly feels more manageable to him. "That's a hundred and forty-four hours," he says, "eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes. *That* doesn't sound so bad; we've done twenty of 'em already." In this moment, the audience witnesses Trotter focusing on something tangible and constant. After all, though something terrible might happen in the intervening time, the hours and minutes themselves will indeed pass. In turn, Trotter gives himself something to expect, managing to ground himself psychologically and maintain a sense of control.

In addition to Trotter's time-chart, Sherriff installs an overarching countdown in *Journey's End*, as Captain Stanhope learns that the Germans will stage a massive attack on the fourth day of his infantry's six-day stint in the trenches. As such, the entire play becomes something of a ticking bomb. By suggesting that the Germans will attack on a certain day, Sherriff gives the soldiers (and the audience) a false sense of certainty—they technically know when to brace themselves, but they don't know the exact time the Germans will strike, nor do they know what form the attack will take. In turn, their supposed certainty only exacerbates their sense of anticipation, making them dread the unknown all the more. Sherriff thus puts audience members in a similar position to the soldiers themselves, inviting them to inhabit the turbulent emotional realm of a person awaiting doom in the trenches, knowing only that something bad will eventually happen. Above all, this technique emphasizes the terror of anticipation in war, suggesting that the mere threat (or promise) of violence can be as harrowing as violence itself.



## FEAR AND COPING

All of the soldiers in *Journey's End* find different ways to cope with their fear. In fact, their responses to fear can be broken into three categories:

acceptance, denial, and evasion. In general, the most emotionally stable characters are those who accept their situation. These are people like Osborne and Raleigh, who acknowledge their own fear and unfortunate circumstances, but still bravely carry out their soldierly duties. Stanhope, on the other hand, tries to stifle (and thus deny) his own fear by drinking heavily, while Hibbert tries to escape the war altogether by lying about various ailments. However, the soldiers best able to handle fear (like Osborne and Raleigh) also end up meeting the worst fate, whereas the least brave characters (like Stanhope and Hibbert) apparently escape unscathed. In this way, Sherriff intimates that although fear and cowardice are generally not seen as desirable traits, they are perhaps appropriate reactions to the gruesomely violent circumstances of war. In other words, the coping mechanisms that actually might help someone get through war are not necessarily those lauded in everyday life.

Soldiers like Osborne and Raleigh don't like their circumstances, but they learn to generally accept that they must live under the constant threat of death. Indeed, they do what they can to normalize their situations. When Raleigh first arrives, he talks with Osborne about his journey to the battlefield, a journey that took him through a number of underground passageways and trenches. On his way, he looked up and saw the flares known as Very lights—lights sent into the air by soldiers to track their enemies during the night. Despite the ominous nature of the Very lights, both Raleigh and Osborne mentally reframe them to make them less frightening. "There's something rather romantic about it all," Osborne says of the lit-up night sky. "Yes," Raleigh agrees. "I thought that, too." In this moment, the audience sees Osborne and Raleigh's ability to reframe parts of the war, shifting their attitudes so they can deal with otherwise terrifying circumstances. Thinking of the Very lights as "romantic" ultimately enables them to ignore—or at least not focus on—ominous notions of violence and death. Simply put, they make the best of their situation.

Stanhope's response to fear represents the second category of coping mechanisms: denial. Everyone in his infantry sees him as a brave captain, but in reality he's just as scared and upset as everyone else, if not more so. The night Osborne—Stanhope's close friend and second-in-command—dies in action, Stanhope parties the night away, eating special foods and encouraging his men to join him in drinking champagne and whiskey. Raleigh, who can't bring himself to participate in the festivities, eventually asks Stanhope how he can eat and drink so heartily after Osborne's death. "To forget, you little fool—to forget!" Stanhope shouts. "You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?" With this exclamation, Stanhope straightforwardly

reveals how he gets through the war: he searches for distractions in order to "forget" the terrible things that have happened (and that *will* happen). He recognizes that there are "limit[s] to what a man can bear," and so he turns to superficial diversions as a way of moving forward.

Like Stanhope, Officer Hibbert has a hard time accepting his circumstances. Rather than drinking, though, he tries to lie his way out of the military by claiming he has a bad case of neuralgia (nerve pain). This is more of an evasive tactic than a coping mechanism, something Hibbert uses so that he doesn't *have* to face his fear at all. When Hibbert says he needs to leave on account of his pain, Stanhope tries to force him to stay. "Stanhope!" Hibbert pleads. "I've tried like hell...Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick. I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand." With this, Hibbert reveals that his neuralgia excuse is just that: an excuse. The true reason he's trying to leave is that he "hates" the trenches. When he tries to maintain that he's "different to the others," Stanhope objects. "I feel the same—exactly the same!" he says. "Why didn't you tell me instead of talking about neuralgia?" After saying this, he encourages Hibbert to drink some whiskey. This, he upholds, is the only thing that enables him to keep from going crazy. In a separate conversation with Osborne about his first few years in the military, Stanhope even confesses: "There was only two ways of breaking the strain. One was pretending I was ill—and going home; the other was this. [*He holds up his glass.*]" Taken in conjunction with his conversation with Hibbert, this solidifies the fact that Stanhope actively uses alcohol as a coping mechanism, suggesting that the only difference between someone like him and someone like Hibbert is that he's willing to numb himself to the world in order to preserve his ability to go on functioning despite his fear.

Of all the characters in *Journey's End*, Osborne and Raleigh are perhaps the most emotionally well-balanced. They don't use alcohol as a psychological crutch, and they don't adopt escapist attitudes. However, they're also the only two characters in the play to die. While Sherriff certainly doesn't condemn their bravery, there's no overlooking the fact that none of the other characters lose their lives over the course of the play. It's only to be expected, then, that the audience might wonder if Osborne and Raleigh's brave response to their dismal situation is almost unnatural, since it involves an acceptance of the unnatural violence of war. Although the positive attitude they display is sought after and praised in the military, it also is what leads them into danger, since their willingness to carry out their duties is what encourages a colonel to choose them as the only two men fit to lead a particularly risky raid on the German trenches. In a sense, then, their acceptance of their own fear only invites more violence and danger into their lives. The fact that they are the only characters to die ultimately calls into question what kind of response is appropriate when it comes to

war and fear. Responding levelheadedly to the insanity of violence, Sherriff intimates, is unnatural, whereas acting out of self-preservation is a natural and beneficial human instinct—even if doing so makes a person appear dysfunctional or cowardly.



## REPETITION, FUTILITY, AND PERSPECTIVE

In *Journey's End*, Sherriff presents to the audience the cyclical nature of life during war. The soldiers in the trenches try to organize their lives around eating meals, drinking tea, sleeping, and taking orders, which ultimately adds a repetitious quality to their collective existence. Indeed, they are always either standing watch or waiting to stand watch. What's more, the kind of violence that characterizes trench warfare is itself repetitive: the attacks come intermittently, such that the soldiers know what to expect but not when to expect it. In turn, this leads to feelings of powerlessness and futility, as if no matter what the soldiers do (and no matter how they prepare), the war will continue forever. As this sensation of helplessness and futility pervades the play, characters like Stanhope undergo what can only be called existential crises; questioning the agency he has within his own life, he develops new perspectives regarding his position in the world. In this way, Sherriff highlights the psychological process that soldiers experience when they feel there is little they can do to influence their lives. Under this interpretation, repetition leads to a sense of futility, and this futility threatens to significantly restructure the way a person conceives of their own existence. By showcasing this progression, Sherriff illustrates to the audience exactly how war alters a person's perspective on life in general.

From the very first scene of the play, Sherriff infuses *Journey's End* with cyclical imagery. When Osborne arrives in the trenches and speaks with Hardy, the man whose position he's taking over, the two men notice an earwig acting strangely on the table. "It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time; must have done a mile," Hardy says. This is a perfect representation of the way the setting of *Journey's End* ensnares its characters, keeping them trapped in the trenches doing the same thing over and over again. Of course, the earwig itself might think it has actually gone somewhere, rather than simply retraced its own steps. Similarly, any sense of progress the soldiers experience in the trenches is superficial or fleeting. For instance, Stanhope privately criticizes Hardy for not tidying up the trenches before leaving, but when Osborne suggests that he himself will clean the trenches the following day, Stanhope laughs and makes it clear that he doesn't truly believe such superficial concerns actually matter. As Stanhope shows his mounting apathy, the audience begins to understand that such chores do nothing to truly influence the war. The soldiers can clean the trenches all they want, but doing so will only

momentarily distract them from the cycle of violence and fear that monopolizes their lives day in and day out. Like the circling earwig, they are merely keeping themselves busy without achieving anything substantial.

Of all the soldiers, Stanhope is the most influenced by the futility of his wartime efforts. However, he is captain of the infantry, so he also tries to stick to protocol, even if doing so feels futile. As he proceeds in this manner, though, the repetitious nature of his duties wears on him more and more, until he starts questioning not only the usefulness of his own efforts, but the entire point of his existence. This soul-searching comes out in a conversation with Osborne, in which Stanhope drunkenly says, "Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it. Looking at you now there's your uniform—your jersey—shirt-vest—then beyond that..." This desire to break things into their tangible parts—to "see right through" them—makes sense for someone struggling to put together his own life in a way that creates greater meaning. As captain, Stanhope has to adhere to everyday patterns and duties, but nothing he does seems to contribute meaningfully to ending the war. No matter what happens, the Germans keep attacking, and he and his comrades keep doing the same things over and over, keeping themselves pointlessly occupied in the trenches. Thus, the components of Stanhope's everyday life don't add up to anything significant. It's unsurprising, then, that he has begun to "see right through" ordinary things, wondering how they might all add up to make something of value. Struggling to find the point of his soldierly efforts, he begins to question the very nature of his existence.

Sherriff doesn't allow Stanhope—or any of his characters—to ever gain any sort of closure regarding the significance of their military actions. This is because as a playwright, he is interested in exploring the existential problems that arise when people have trouble finding meaning in their everyday lives—not in the conclusions they may or may not reach. Indeed, the play itself ends in the middle of a battle, suggesting that the violence to which these soldiers have become accustomed will inevitably continue (in real life, the Battle of St. Quentin did indeed last for three full days, and World War I itself didn't end for another eight months). Simply put, the end of the war—the "journey's end"—is to these soldiers elusive and seemingly unattainable. This, in turn, makes their efforts seem pointless, and this outlook refigures the way they think, forcing them to question their purpose. Most importantly, Stanhope exemplifies how this search for meaning easily turns inward, as he grasps at existential quandaries and reexamines his place in the world. This, it seems, is what Sherriff is most interested in revealing: the fact that, despite its patterns and protocols, war is an inscrutable thing that has the power to fundamentally alter the way people conceive of life itself.





## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## TROTTER'S CHART

On the first night that Stanhope's infantry moves into the trenches to begin their six-day shift, Trotter talks to his fellow officers about the time they have to pass before they'll be able to return to a safer location. "Well, boys!" he says. "Ere we are for six days again. Six bloomin' eternal days. [*He makes a calculation on the table.*] That's a hundred and forty-four hours; eight thousand six 'undred and forty minutes. *That* doesn't sound so bad; we've done twenty of 'em already. I've got an idea! I'm going to draw a hundred and forty-four little circles on a bit o' paper, and every hour I'm going to black one in; that'll make the time go all right." Saying this, he draws up a chart, one that he can use to track the passage of time. In doing so, he tries to secure a small amount of agency over the way the time moves, which he otherwise can't control. Without counting down the remaining hours and displaying them on a piece of paper, the time left in the trenches feels "eternal." Breaking the days into manageable chunks, though, makes the time left sound not "so bad," since the act suddenly assigns tangible units (hours and minutes) to days otherwise characterized by fear, uncertainty, and powerlessness. In this way, Trotter's chart comes to represent not only his desire to control his own circumstances, but also the elaborate ways in which these men invent ways of coping with their terror and helplessness during war.



## THE EARWIG

When Osborne arrives in the trenches and talks to Hardy, both men notice an earwig running around a candle over and over again. "It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time," Hardy marvels. "Must have done a mile." Given the cyclical nature of life in these trenches, this image of a bug sprinting circles in the dugout is quite resonant. Indeed, the soldiers in *Journey's End* experience a repetitious pattern: they wait for something bad to happen, then something bad *does* happen, and then they go back to waiting for the next bad thing to happen. As a result, their efforts as soldiers in the trenches begin to take on a rather futile quality, as if no matter what happens, the war will continue. As such, an earwig running a mile while merely circling the same spot is rather representative of the soldiers' collective existence, since it symbolizes a lack of true progress. What's more, Hardy tells Osborne that if he wants to win an earwig race (a game the soldiers sometimes bet on), he should dip his insect in whiskey, which will make it go faster than its competitors. Yet again, then, the earwig represents a phenomenon in the soldiers' lives,

since Stanhope—the captain himself—openly admits that the only thing keeping him going is whiskey. In this way, Sherriff uses the earwig as a representation of the soldiers' lives during wartime, allowing it to show the audience what it looks like to lead an almost intoxicatingly unproductive existence.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Journey's End* published in 1929.

## Act 1 Quotes

☛ OSBORNE: He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

HARDY: Oh, he's a good chap, I know. But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whisky he does. D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—we timed him.

OSBORNE: I suppose it amused everybody; I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.



HARDY: He didn't want any 'cheering' on—

OSBORNE: No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do. [*There is a pause.*] Didn't they?

HARDY: Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home—

OSBORNE: When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whisky for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

**Related Characters:** Hardy, Osborne (speaker), Stanhope

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 12

## Explanation and Analysis

In this conversation, Osborne and Hardy discuss Stanhope's drinking habits. Osborne has just arrived in the dugout, where he and his men will take over from Hardy, the previous captain commanding the trenches. When Hardy expresses his awe regarding Stanhope's unfathomable alcohol tolerance, Osborne allows an edge of frustration—or disapproval—to slip into his voice. "I suppose it amused everybody," he says in response to Hardy's story

about Stanhope in Valennes. “I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.” Saying this, Osborne assumes a somewhat fatherly tone, one that gently admonishes Hardy for encouraging Stanhope to indulge his vices. “When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit,” Osborne adds, making his disapproval even more clear. Of course, this disapproval arises from the fact that Osborne and Stanhope are good friends, and the level-headed Osborne doesn’t want to see a young captain undo himself simply for “the morbid curiosity” of other soldiers who don’t care enough to stop him from poisoning himself. What’s more, it’s worth noting that this conversation takes place in the play’s first scene—before Stanhope has even arrived on stage. As such, Sherriff prepares the audience to meet a haggard character, the kind of man who can drink an entire bottle of whiskey and then “pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home.” This effectively creates a tense sort of anticipation as the audience awaits Stanhope’s entrance—similar to the kind of anticipation the soldiers themselves feel as they sit in the trenches waiting for something to happen.

OSBORNE: You may find he’s—he’s a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH [*laughing*]: Oh, I know old Dennis’s temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump.

[OSBORNE *laughs*]

He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing.

OSBORNE: You must remember he’s commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times. It’s—it’s a big strain on a man. [...] If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you’ll know it’s only the strain—

**Related Characters:** Raleigh, Osborne (speaker), Stanhope

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 19

### Explanation and Analysis

When Osborne and Raleigh meet for the first time in the dugout, they discuss Stanhope. Raleigh tells Osborne that he actually knows Stanhope from school, even admitting that he went out of his way to get himself placed in

Stanhope’s infantry. Sensing that Raleigh looks up to Stanhope—and knowing that Stanhope has become a hard-drinking captain—Osborne tries to prepare Raleigh for the shock of suddenly seeing that his old friend has gone through a significant transformation. “You may find he’s—he’s a little bit quick-tempered,” Osborne says, expressing his understanding that war often fundamentally changes people. Indeed, Osborne can most likely guess that Raleigh has high expectations for Stanhope, who is—and always has been—a boyhood hero of sorts. Now, though, Stanhope is a depressed alcoholic prone to outbursts of rage. Despite Osborne’s good sense to warn Raleigh about this, the young man doesn’t fully grasp his intent, instead insisting that he already knows Stanhope’s temper. Of course, the “temper” Raleigh thinks he knows is surely not the same as the kind of temper Stanhope displays in the trenches, but Raleigh is too naïve and inexperienced to adequately come to terms with the idea that war fundamentally changes people.

RALEIGH: It’s—it’s not exactly what I thought. It’s just this—this quiet that seems so funny.

OSBORNE: A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dugouts, thinking how quiet it is.


RALEIGH: Are they as near as that?

OSBORNE: About a hundred yards.

RALEIGH: It seems—uncanny. It makes me feel we’re—we’re all just waiting for something.

OSBORNE: We are, generally, just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.

**Related Characters:** Osborne, Raleigh (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 20


### Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place during Raleigh and Osborne’s initial conversation about the war, when Raleigh arrives in the dugout for the first time. What becomes clear is that they are well-suited to one another, often agreeing about the peculiarities of war—a dynamic that runs throughout the play. Indeed, Osborne can almost be seen as something like an older version of Raleigh, and so he helps Raleigh conceptualize what it’s like to exist in combat locations. When Raleigh says that the “quiet” of the battlefield is

unnerving, Osborne helps him see that this is exactly what it's like to be at war. "A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in *their* dugouts, thinking how quiet it is," he says, showing the young man that his perception of the trenches is quite normal. "It seems—uncanny," Raleigh admits, suggesting that he finds the entire situation somewhat surreal. After all, the word "uncanny" is often applied to things that are "beyond what is normal or expected." Indeed, Raleigh *expected* violence and action and commotion, but now he feels like he's just "waiting for something." In order to help the young man feel less like this is "uncanny," Osborne assures him that they (as soldiers) *are* "just waiting for something." In doing so, he reveals the cyclical, repetitive nature of war.

☛ It was all right at first. When I went home on leave after six months it was jolly fine to feel I'd done a little to make her pleased. [*He takes a gulp of his drink.*] It was after I came back here—in that awful affair on Vimy Ridge. I knew I'd go mad if I didn't break the strain. I couldn't bear being fully conscious all the time—you've felt that, Uncle, haven't you? [...] There were only two ways of breaking the strain. One was pretending I was ill—and going home; the other was this. [*He holds up his glass.*] [...] I thought it all out. It's a slimy thing to go home if you're not really ill, isn't it?

**Related Characters:** Stanhope (speaker), Osborne

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 32

### Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Stanhope tells Osborne about his fears of returning home to his girlfriend, Raleigh's sister. At first, he explains, he had no problem seeing her when he was on military leave. This was after only six months of the war, and he felt "jolly fine" to come home with the sense that he'd "done a little to make [his lover] pleased." When he says this, the audience understands that Stanhope is burdened by ideas of valor and pride; he doesn't want to let down the people he's left at home. Unfortunately, though, war is full of terror, and when he joined the fighting again after his first leave, he experienced an "awful" battle, one that clearly changed him for the worse, making him feel as if he'd "go mad" if he didn't "break the strain." Indeed, this is why he has turned to alcohol: to numb his fears so that he won't disappoint Raleigh's sister. The only other option would be to "pretend" he's sick, which he believes is "a slimy thing" to

do.


☛ OSBORNE: I believe Raleigh'll go on liking you—and looking up to you—through everything. There's something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship.

STANHOPE: Hero-worship be damned! [*He pauses, then goes on, in a strange, high-pitched voice*] You know, Uncle, I'm an *awful* fool. I'm *captain* of this company. What's that bloody little prig of a boy matter? D'you see? He's a little prig. Wants to write home and tell Madge all about *me*. Well, he won't; d'you see, Uncle? He *won't* write! Censorship! I censor his letters—cross out all he says about me.

OSBORNE: You can't read his letters.

STANHOPE [*dreamily*]: Cross out all he says about me. Then we all go west in the big attack—and she goes on thinking I'm a fine fellow for ever—and ever—and ever. [*He pours out a drink, murmuring 'Ever—and ever—and ever.'*]

**Related Characters:** Stanhope (speaker), Raleigh

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

During this conversation, Osborne tries to convince Stanhope to go easy on Raleigh, insisting that the young man will "go on liking" him "through everything," despite Stanhope's excessive drinking, bad temper, and shot nerves. "There's something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship," he says, suggesting that some relational bonds are so strong and resilient that they can withstand many changes and strains. Stanhope, however, pays no attention to his friend's sound counsel, instead coming to the conclusion that because he is captain he shouldn't have to worry about some "bloody little prig of a boy" like Raleigh, who he believes is going to ruin his life by revealing his new wretched ways to his lover (Raleigh's sister). In this moment, Stanhope calls upon his superior rank as a way of ignoring the personal connection he has with Raleigh, thereby enabling him to conclude that he should censor the boy's letters. When Osborne says he shouldn't do this, he disregards him, since he has already managed to find an interpretation in which it's acceptable to meddle in Raleigh's personal affairs—after all, Stanhope is "*captain* of this company," giving him the right to do whatever he wants. Interestingly enough, he also talks about going "west in the big attack," fantasizing about the fact that if he dies, Raleigh's sister will "go on thinking [he's] a fine fellow for

ever,” a notion that suggests he values his reputation more than his own life.

## Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes



●● OSBORNE: I remember up at Wipers we had a man shot when he was out on patrol. Just at dawn. We couldn't get him in that night. He lay out there groaning all day. Next night three of our men crawled out to get him in. It was so near the German trenches that they could have shot our fellows one by one. But, when our men began dragging the wounded man back over the rough ground, a big German officer stood up in their trenches and called out. 'Carry him!'—and our fellows stood up and carried the man back and the German officer fired some lights for them to see by.

RALEIGH: How topping!

OSBORNE: Next day we blew each other's trenches to blazes.

RALEIGH: It all seems rather—*silly*, doesn't it?

**Related Characters:** Osborne, Raleigh (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

Osborne's story about the kindness of the German soldiers emphasizes something that is easy to forget: wars are fought by *people*, not by faceless entities. As such, empathy and good will can indeed flow between enemies, which is exactly what happened when the German officer stood up and told Osborne's men to carry their wounded comrade. Unfortunately, though, this kind of empathy often ends up getting reversed, since war progresses in cycles of violence. Indeed, the "next day" Osborne's men and the kind Germans "blew each other's trenches to blazes." When Raleigh says that "it all seems rather silly," he picks up on the seeming futility of war, sensing the inherent stupidity and pointlessness of constantly working to decimate an enemy that is similarly working to decimate him, when the individual soldiers have no real reason to have a personal grudge against those they are trying to kill.

●● I was feeling bad. I forgot Raleigh was out there with Trotter. I'd forgotten all about him. I was sleepy. I just knew something beastly had happened. Then he came in with Trotter—and looked at me. After coming in out of the night air, this place must have reeked of candle-grease, and rats—and whisky. One thing a boy like that can't stand is a smell that isn't fresh. He looked at me as if I'd hit him between the eyes—as if I'd spat on him—

**Related Characters:** Stanhope (speaker), Osborne, Raleigh, Trotter

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 47

### Explanation and Analysis

Stanhope says this to Osborne while trying to convince him that Raleigh no longer respects him. Afraid that the young man now sees him as a miserable drunkard, Stanhope has become acutely aware of his own appearance and lifestyle. Indeed, Raleigh's presence clarifies his own existence, as he suddenly notices how rotten his surroundings are. "This place must have reeked of candle-grease, and rats—and whisky," he says, newly self-conscious of the wretchedness of his circumstances. What's more, it's worth noting that when Stanhope first awoke, he was certain "something beastly had happened." That his first instinct is to assume disaster and calamity is quite telling, as it demonstrates to the audience the intensity of his fear—this is a man who can't even spend one waking second without bracing for the worst-case scenario. In turn, this is the kind of psychological uneasiness that has made him into the kind of person who is embarrassed of his own appearance, the kind of person who wants to hide from someone like Raleigh for fear of losing the young man's respect.



## Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

☞ S-M: Well, then, sir. If they don't get through the first day, they'll attack the next day and the next—

STANHOPE: They're bound to.

S-M: Then oughtn't we to fix up something about, well [*he gropes for the right words*]—er—falling back?

STANHOPE: There's no need to—you see, this company's a lot better than A and B Companies on either side of us.

S-M: Quite, sir.

STANHOPE: Well, then, if anyone breaks, A and B will break before we do. As long as we stick here when the other companies have given way, we can fire into the Boche as they try and get through the gaps on our sides—we'll make a hell of a mess of them. We might delay the advance a whole day.

S-M [*diffidently*]: Yes, sir, but what 'appens when the Boche 'as all got round the back of us?

STANHOPE: Then we advance and win the war.

**Related Characters:** Stanhope, The Sergeant-Major (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   



**Page Number:** 51

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, the Sergeant-Major tries to discern whether or not Stanhope has prepared an alternative way to respond to the German attack. Because the attack is expected to be so harrowing, the Sergeant-Major wants to know if there is any possibility of “falling back” (retreating) if the company is unable to keep the Germans at bay. Unfortunately, Stanhope hasn't been given any instructions to devise such a plan, and so he simply says, “There's no need to.” Of course, the audience knows that Stanhope himself isn't quite as ignorant as he appears in this moment, since he has previously admitted that he is quite afraid of dying. Nonetheless, he chooses to focus only on what he has been ordered to do, so that when the Sergeant-Major asks what will happen when German soldiers break through the infantry line and swarm at their backs, he says, “Then we advance and win the war.” Of course, this is a very simplistic way of thinking, since in these circumstances “advance[ing]” wouldn't mean that they would “win the war.” Still, though, Stanhope has been ordered to hold his ground, and so he focuses unquestioningly on the task at hand, disregarding even his own fear by keeping himself from thinking too hard about the logistics of his duty.

☞ Stanhope! I've tried like hell—I swear I have. Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick. I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand. It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer. I'll never go up those steps again—into the line—with the men looking at me—and knowing—I'd rather die here. [*He is sitting on STANHOPE'S bed, crying without effort to restrain himself.*]

**Related Characters:** Hibbert (speaker), Stanhope

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 57

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this moment, Hibbert finally admits to Stanhope that he doesn't actually have neuralgia, revealing that he has been lying about this ailment in order to go home. This is because he has “hated and loathed” the trenches ever since he first arrived, feeling deathly afraid all the while. “It's got worse and worse, and now I can't bear it any longer,” he says, outlining the increasingly intense psychological effects the war has had on him. What seems to make his predicament even harder to withstand is the fact that he has to pretend as if he's a brave officer in front of his men. Indeed, it's his duty to go up the dugout steps and into the trenches and act fearless while his men look to him for courage. And yet, what he really feels is that he'd “rather die” in the safety of the dugout. By showcasing the fact that soldiers feel pressured to behave in valorous, brave ways, Sherriff demonstrates to the audience that the psychological stressors of war don't only have to do with the surrounding violence, but also with the various social pressures and expectations with which a soldier must contend.

☞ If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life! [*There is silence again.*] You may be wounded. Then you can go home and feel proud—and if you're killed you—you won't have to stand this hell any more. I might have fired just now. If I had you would have been dead now. But you're still alive—with a straight fighting chance of coming through. Take the chance, old chap, and stand in with Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?—when you know they all feel like you do—in their hearts—and just go on sticking it because they know it's—it's the only thing a decent man can do.

**Related Characters:** Stanhope (speaker), Hibbert, Osborne, Raleigh, Trotter

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis

Stanhope speaks these words to Hibbert, who has just told him that he wants to escape the war by pretending to have neuralgia. In order to convince Hibbert to stay, Stanhope tries to get him to recognize the camaraderie that exists in the trenches between officers. He does this by emphasizing the fact that deserting the war would mean leaving behind “Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men” in the trenches. Another interesting element of Stanhope’s monologue is the way he frames death. Indeed, he talks about death as if it’s not a particularly bad or undesirable thing. “If you’re killed,” he says, “you won’t have to stand this hell any more.” Under this interpretation, death is better than the awful feeling of waiting and waiting for something bad to happen. In turn, Sherriff suggests once again that the psychological effects of war are often just as challenging to deal with as the actual violence and danger that come along with armed conflict.

●● OSBORNE: Haven’t you read it?

TROTTER [*scornfully*]: No!

OSBORNE: You ought to. [*Reads*]

How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale?  
How cheerfully he seems to grin  
And neatly spread his claws,  
And welcomes little fishes in  
With gently smiling jaws!

TROTTER [*after a moment’s thought*]: I don’t see no point in that.

OSBORNE [*wearily*]: Exactly. That’s just the point.

**Related Characters:** Osborne, Trotter (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place after Osborne has just told Trotter that he (Osborne) has to lead a dangerous raid on

the German trenches. After a few moments of discussing the mission, Osborne decides to turn his attention to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, since Trotter’s pessimism about the raid isn’t helping his own thoughts about the risky endeavor. When he reads Trotter this passage, Trotter has trouble making any sense out of the rhyme, but the two stanzas actually *do* have a meaning. Indeed, the second stanza in particular describes a “crocodile” opening its mouth and letting “little fishes” swim unknowingly into its “smiling jaws.” Given that Osborne and Trotter have just finished talking about the deadly raid Osborne has to make on the German line, it’s clear that this passage from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* stands out to him because he feels as if *he* is a “little fish” about to swim naively into an expectant and harmful mouth. When Trotter says, “I don’t see no point in that,” Osborne somberly agrees, but this is because he’s not truly thinking about the passage of poetry, but about the raid itself. Indeed, there is “no point” in carrying out the mission if the Germans are just going to kill them. In this way, Sherriff shows the audience how even the most good-spirited soldiers (like Osborne) can succumb to feelings of futility and pointlessness during war.

## Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

●● RALEIGH: Good God! Don’t you understand? How *can* I sit down and eat that—when—[*his voice is nearly breaking*—when Osborne’s—lying—out there—

[STANHOPE *rises slowly. His eyes are wide and staring; he is fighting for breath, and his words come brokenly.*]

STANHOPE: My God! You bloody little swine! You think I don’t care—you think you’re the only soul that cares!



RALEIGH: And yet you can sit there and drink champagne—and smoke cigars—

STANHOPE: The one man I could trust—my best friend—the one man I could talk to as man to man—who understood everything—and you don’t think I care—

RALEIGH: But how can you when—?

STANHOPE: To forget, you little fool—to forget! D’you understand? To forget! You think there’s no limit to what a man can bear?

**Related Characters:** Raleigh, Stanhope (speaker), Osborne

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 85

### Explanation and Analysis

Raleigh and Stanhope have this argument on the night of Osborne's death. As Osborne's body lies out in the battlefield, Stanhope dines in great excess with the other officers, but Raleigh refuses to come into the dugout to partake in the merriment, instead choosing to eat with his men in the trenches. The idea of sitting down and eating "when Osborne's" still "lying" "out there" is sickening to Raleigh, but Stanhope seems to *need* the distraction, as made evident by his sudden outburst. In this moment, the audience understands that Stanhope's seemingly callous reaction to Osborne's death isn't because he doesn't care,

but because he cares too much. In the same way that he drinks in order to escape his own fear, in this moment he parties in order to "forget" about "his best friend's" death. Indeed, he upholds that there's a "limit to what a man can bear," and it seems rather apparent that he himself has reached that limit. Though he may have been able to put up with the war, the idea of losing Osborne is simply too much, and so he must drink and eat and party "to forget," once more putting on display his never-ending struggle to cope with the horror and sadness of his wartime circumstances.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## ACT 1

It is Monday, March 18th, 1918, and Captain Hardy is drying his wet sock over a candle flame. He sits in the dugout of the British trenches in St. Quentin, France, where the military is involved in trench warfare with German forces stationed only 70 yards away. As he dries his sock, Hardy sings a little ditty, mumbling, “Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock, / And we’ll start the day over again.” As he finishes, Osborne descends into the dugout, and the two men have a drink together. “Your fellows arriving?” asks Hardy, and Osborne tells him that they are indeed on their way. Over their cups of whiskey, Osborne says he heard that the trenches have been rather quiet, and Hardy says, “Well, yes—in a way. But you never know. Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end; then—all of a sudden—‘over she comes!’—rifle grenades.”

Hardy mentions to Osborne that “the big German attack’s expected any day now,” and Osborne points out that it has been expected for the entire month. “Are you here for six days?” Hardy asks, and when Osborne confirms that he is, Hardy guesses that Osborne will surely be here when the attack comes. “Well, you won’t be far away,” replies Osborne. “Come along, let’s do this handing over. Where’s the map?” With this, the two men go over the various details that Osborne needs to know about the dugout before Hardy can leave (he has, after all, just finished his own six-day shift).

*From the very outset of Journey’s End, Sherriff’s interest in the passage of time becomes apparent. “Tick!—Tock!—wind up the clock, / And we’ll start the day over again,” Hardy sings to himself, indicating just how attuned he is to the ways in which time moves. This focus on the time becomes even more evident when Osborne and Hardy talk about how the trenches have been calm and quiet. Indeed, a sense of anticipation builds during periods in which “nothing happens for hours on end”—a kind of anticipation to which the soldiers no doubt must be accustomed.*



*When Hardy and Osborne discuss “the big German attack,” they once again reveal their sense of anticipation. Indeed, they’ve been waiting for this attack for quite some time, and even though it seems as if they’re edging closer to the actual event, they still are locked in a holding pattern of tension, one in which all they can do is conjecture about when it will actually take place. In this way, Sherriff demonstrates that one of the most difficult parts of being at war is the uncertainty that comes along with waiting for something bad to happen.*





Osborne tells Hardy they're expecting a new officer, and Hardy says, "I hope you get better luck than I did with my last officer. He got lumbago the first night and went home." Refocusing, Osborne asks about the various weapons and supplies, of which he's supposed to take an inventory. Hardy tells him vague numbers, assuring him that everything's there and admitting that he didn't even count the supplies when he took over. He then makes haste, not wanting to overlap with Stanhope—the captain taking over for him—because he knows Stanhope will force him to clean the trenches before leaving. "How is the dear young boy?" Hardy asks. "Drinking like a fish, as usual?" Osborne claims that Stanhope is the best commander possible, and though Hardy doesn't disagree, all he can seemingly focus on is the man's prolific drinking habits.

"When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking," Osborne says, "he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whisky for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it." He also points out that Stanhope has been in the war for three consecutive years. Apparently, he enlisted after school and has "never had a rest" since then, choosing to spend his leave in Paris rather than at home. "And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard," says Osborne. Hardy tells a story about how Stanhope recently had an argument while playing cards and suddenly knocked everything off the table, "lost control of himself," and broke into tears. Perhaps given this—or because of Osborne's wisdom and age—Hardy says that Osborne should be the one commanding the infantry.

Just before Hardy leaves, he pauses and looks at the table. "Why, that **earwig**. It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time; must have done a mile," he says. Osborne says that if he were an earwig, he wouldn't be spending time in the trenches. "Nor should I," Hardy says, and then tells Osborne that the best way to win "earwig races" is to dip them in whiskey, which "makes 'em go like hell!" When he leaves, Mason, the cook, enters and offers Osborne cutlets. When Osborne presses him, though, he admits that the so-called "cutlets" are really just "ordinary ration meat" that he made in a new shape.

*Although Journey's End is not first and foremost a comedic play, there are often moments of dark or deadpan humor that shed light on the soldiers' attitudes regarding the war. For instance, the fact that Hardy's officer managed to go home because of a case of lumbago is indeed rather funny, since lumbago is an everyday injury that frequently amounts to little more than back pain. That a soldier would use this as an excuse to go home illustrates just how desperate many of these men are to leave the war. Rather than staying and facing their fears, they'd rather lie about some kind of ailment. On another note, Sherriff uses this moment to introduce Captain Stanhope before the man actually makes an appearance onstage, thereby building him into a figure of curiosity, especially since Osborne and Hardy seem to both respect him and disapprove of his drinking habits. By foregrounding Stanhope's entrance with this conversation, Sherriff invites the audience to inhabit the world of anticipation—the world of waiting—that the soldiers themselves experience on a daily basis.*



*Sherriff makes an effort in this scene to present Stanhope as an unstable character. While Osborne defends his friend by pointing out that Stanhope has "never had a rest," it's clear that the captain is a bit unhinged, especially if a mere card game can bring him to violent tears. By preparing the audience to meet such a loose cannon, Sherriff continues to create the same kind of tense anticipation that the soldiers likely feel when they're in the trenches waiting for something bad to happen.*



*When Hardy notices that the earwig on the table has been running in circles, Sherriff presents the audience with an image of futility. Despite how hard the earwig has worked—running for an entire mile—it hasn't made any progress at all. This ultimately foreshadows the feeling of futility and repetition that bothers the men throughout the play, as they constantly wait for something to happen and then, after something actually does happen, they simply start waiting again. What's more, the earwig's pointless and repetitive efforts align with Mason's unsuccessful attempt to become innovative with the ration meat. Indeed, Mason can try all he wants to improve upon the dreadful food he's supposed to cook, but at the end of the day, he can't change the fact that he's serving the soldiers the same low-quality fare.*



At this point, the new officer arrives. His name is Raleigh, and he's a "healthy-looking boy of about eighteen" who looks a bit "bewildered" by the squalid dugout. Nonetheless, he radiates a positive attitude, greeting Osborne as "sir" and gingerly accepting a drink of whiskey. Osborne explains to Raleigh that he is the second-in-command and that the others call him "Uncle." He also explains that their group has just moved into these trenches, and that Captain Stanhope is the commander. At the mention of Stanhope's name, Raleigh perks up, saying, "I know. It's a frightful bit of luck." Apparently, he knows Stanhope from school. "I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows," he says, "he's three years older than I am."

Raleigh tells Osborne that Stanhope was the rugby captain at his school. When Osborne asks if Raleigh also played, he says, "Oh, yes. Of course, I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope?" Moving on, he explains that his father is friends with Stanhope's father, and that because of this the two of them have spent time together during the summers. In fact, Stanhope even has a romantic relationship with Raleigh's sister, who is waiting for him to return from the war. "You know, Raleigh," Osborne says at one point, "you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same." When he sees Raleigh's confusion, Osborne says, "You see, [Stanhope's] been out here a long time. It—it tells on a man—rather badly—"

Osborne adds that Stanhope is a "bit quick-tempered," but Raleigh merely says, "Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump. He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing." Hearing this, Osborne urges Raleigh to keep in mind that Stanhope has been commanding the company for quite some time, and that this is "a big strain on a man." "If you notice a—difference in Stanhope," he says, "you'll know it's just the strain."

*Because the small amount of information the audience has already heard about Stanhope makes him out to be an unstable drunk, the fact that Raleigh knows him from school is quite significant. Indeed, the circumstances of their previous relationship are quite clearly much different than they will be here. After all, going to school with somebody is quite different than fighting alongside them in the trenches of World War I. As such, Sherriff adds yet another layer of uncertainty and anticipation to the audience's perception of Stanhope, encouraging them to wonder how he and Raleigh will interact.*



*Osborne's advice that Raleigh shouldn't expect to find Stanhope "quite the same" reveals his understanding of the ways in which war can change a person. Suggesting that life in the trenches can "tell on a man—rather badly," he tries to get Raleigh to accept the fact that his relationship—or even friendship—with Stanhope developed in an entirely different context. In this new context, Stanhope may very well be a completely different person, meaning that the terms of his and Raleigh's friendship will most likely also be different. Not only is Stanhope Raleigh's superior, but he's also a rugged alcoholic, and Osborne wisely intuits that this isn't who Stanhope used to be when he was a rugby captain in high school.*



*The fact that Raleigh can't keep himself from referring to Stanhope as "Dennis" supports Osborne's notion that the boy will likely have to shift the way he sees the captain. Unfortunately, Raleigh doesn't seem to fully grasp this, as made clear by the way he misunderstands Osborne's comment about Stanhope's temper. Whereas Osborne is referring to the kind of temper that causes Stanhope to erupt in irrational anger in the middle of a card game, Raleigh assumes that he is talking about Stanhope's admirable tendency to hold the people around him to a high standard. However, it's obvious that Stanhope—an alcoholic himself now—no longer cares about whether or not his inferiors get drunk, and the fact that Raleigh thinks he still would care about this just goes to show that the young boy hasn't yet comprehended how the war has changed his friend.*



Osborne and Raleigh discuss the fact that their trench is only 70 yards from German trenches, though the “front line” is between them (*their* line is called the “support line”). “I’ve never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by,” Raleigh says, referring to the ones he passed on his way to the support line. “It’s just this—this quiet that seems so funny,” he says, and Osborne notes that the Germans are probably “sitting in *their* dugouts” thinking the same thing. “It seems—uncanny,” Raleigh says. “It makes me feel we’re—we’re all just waiting for something.” To this, Osborne replies, “We are, generally just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.”

Raleigh describes his journey to the support line, describing the many trenches he traveled through. On his way, he saw the sky was lit up with lights called Very lights, which soldiers send into the air in order to “watch for raids and patrols.” Regarding these lights, Osborne says, “There’s something rather romantic about it all.” When Raleigh agrees, he adds, “You must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps.”

Mason enters the dugout, interrupting Osborne and Raleigh’s conversation by informing Osborne that the can of pineapple chunks he secured for the company is in fact a can of apricots, which Stanhope hates. Mason seems ill-at-ease, telling Osborne that he wanted to tell him first so that Stanhope won’t blame him (Mason). Just then, Stanhope enters and Mason retreats into the kitchen to bring out soup. The first thing Stanhope does is ask if Hardy left without cleaning the trenches. Then he sees Raleigh, and he doesn’t know what to do. “Hullo, Stanhope!” beams Raleigh. “How did you—get here?” Stanhope manages. When Raleigh tells him he was “told to report” to his company, Stanhope mutters, “Oh. I see. Rather a coincidence.”

*It’s clear that Raleigh expected war to be a constant barrage of noise and violence and chaos. It’s natural, then, that he finds himself disoriented by the relative calm of the trenches, the “uncann[iness]” of the dugouts. In this moment, Sherriff suggests that expectations play an important role in keeping a soldier psychologically at ease. Although Raleigh would surely prefer calm and peace to violence and action, he has prepared himself for the latter, and thus now feels unprepared for the wartime circumstances in which he finds himself. Indeed, he didn’t count on the feeling of tense anticipation, the feeling that he is “just waiting for something” bad to happen. This, Osborne tells him, is simply the nature of war—it is a cycle of inaction and action.*



*In this moment, Sherriff suggests that soldiers must find ways to reframe their circumstances. This is what Osborne does when he encourages Raleigh to see the Very lights as “romantic.” Rather than dwelling on the ominous nature of these lights—which are used for chiefly violent purposes—he urges Raleigh to shift his perspective so that the lights become appealing and nostalgic, as if the soldiers are looking out at the blinking lights of a beautiful city.*



*Right before Stanhope enters, Sherriff uses one last opportunity to portray him as an unpredictable and ill-tempered captain. He does this by having Mason become fearful that Stanhope will berate him for obtaining the wrong kind of canned fruit, thereby casting Stanhope as not only ill-tempered, but also petty and unreasonable. Having thoroughly built up a sense of suspense regarding this character, then, he finally introduces Stanhope. What the audience sees upon meeting him, though, is not an enraged drunk, but a man caught off-guard by an old friend, thereby further casting him as a complex character, since he doesn’t yell or shout or do anything rash, but instead quietly tries to piece together his confusion regarding Raleigh’s presence.*



Osborne breaks the tension between Stanhope and Raleigh by informing Stanhope that they'll have to make do with apricots instead of pineapples. At this, Trotter—one of the other officers, who entered the dugout with Stanhope—rejoices, saying he loves apricots and hates pineapples. He then introduces himself to Raleigh, asking the boy if he feels “odd” being out in the trenches. “Yes. A bit,” Raleigh admits, and Trotter says, “Oh, well, you’ll soon get used to it; you’ll feel you’ve been ‘ere a year in about an hour’s time.” Trotter then falls into a conversation about Mason’s food, criticizing the soup’s lack of pepper and poking fun at Mason’s attempt to turn the ration meat into “cutlets.”

“Well, boys!” Trotter says, “ ‘Ere we are for six days again. Six bloomin’ eternal days.” As he says this, he does some arithmetic on the table, figuring out that they have 144 hours left of duty in these trenches. “Eight thousand six ‘undred and forty minutes,” he says. “*That* doesn’t sound so bad; we’ve done twenty of ‘em already. I’ve got an idea! I’m going to draw a hundred and forty-four circles on a bit o’ paper, and every hour I’m going to black one in; that’ll make the time go all right.” Looking at Trotter’s **chart**, Stanhope tells him he ought to go up and stand watch, assuring him he can “black in three of [his] bloody little circles” when he returns.

Trotter and Raleigh go together to work a shift above the dugout. Meanwhile, Osborne and Stanhope decide which beds they’ll take while Stanhope drinks whiskey. When Hibbert (the fourth and final officer) enters, he claims that he has a bad case of neuralgia; so bad that he can’t even imagine eating because of the pain. “Try and forget about it,” Stanhope says, but Hibbert decides to go straight to bed. Once he’s gone, Stanhope grumbles, “Another little worm trying to wriggle home,” but Osborne shows more sympathy, wondering if Hibbert’s pain might actually be real. “You can’t help feeling sorry for him,” he says. “I think he’s tried hard.” Still, though, Stanhope remains unconvinced, saying, “He’s decided to go home and spend the rest of the war in comfortable nerve hospitals. Well, he’s mistaken. I let Warren get away like that, but no more.”

*Trotter’s assertion that Raleigh will feel like he’s been in the trenches for “a year” after only an hour once again taps into the play’s interest in the way time moves. The fear of war—the anticipation of impending doom—seems to warp the way these men perceive the passage of time, elongating it in strange ways and upending their internal sense of chronology.*



*When Trotter makes it clear that he and his fellow officers have to spend six days in this dangerous dugout, the audience begins to understand why, exactly, they are all so obsessed with time. After all, not only are these men expecting and bracing for a harrowing attack by the Germans, they’re also waiting to leave. In turn, there’s little chance they’ll be able to stop thinking about how the time passes, so Trotter decides to draw up a physical representation of the hours they have left. At the very least, this might help them feel as if they have a modicum of control over their lives, which is something they otherwise lack completely, since they can’t actually influence what happens or when it happens.*



*Hibbert’s complaints about neuralgia recall the story Hardy told Osborne at the beginning of the play about the officer who went home because of a case of “lumbago.” What’s more, even Stanhope seems to have let somebody leave the trenches before, as he reveals by saying that he allowed a man name Warren to leave because of medical reasons. In turn, Sherriff shows the audience that there’s a pattern amongst British soldiers of fleeing the war because of (most likely) pretend medical ailments. This is an escapist way of dealing with the fear presented by war. However, Stanhope seems resolved to keep Hibbert in his trenches, believing that such behavior is nothing short of cowardly.*





Osborne changes the subject, saying Raleigh is a “good-looking youngster.” When he reveals that Raleigh mentioned the fact that he and Stanhope went to school together, Stanhope seems immediately put off, saying, “Has he been talking already?” In response, Osborne points out that Raleigh is simply happy to have been placed in Stanhope’s company. “He seems to think a lot of you,” he says. “Yes, I’m his hero,” says Stanhope. Osborne points out that this is natural, maintaining that boys at school often have heroes and that this kind of admiration “often goes on as long as—” At this point, Stanhope interrupts him, saying, “As long as the hero’s a hero.”

Stanhope shows Osborne a picture of Raleigh’s sister. “She is waiting for me,” he says, “and she doesn’t know. She thinks I’m a wonderful chap—commanding a company. She doesn’t know that if I went up those steps into the front line—without being doped with whisky—I’d go mad with fright.” Hearing this, Osborne suggests that Stanhope take a break, insisting that the Colonel would be happy to let him leave for a while, given his track record. Nonetheless, Stanhope resolves to “stick it out,” saying he might not have much longer anyway, since a man only has a finite amount of luck. Still, he says it’s “rather damnable” that Raleigh has come under his watch, since the boy is a “hero-worshipper” who he now feels obligated to protect.

Continuing with his complaints, Stanhope tells Osborne that the idea of returning from the war and reuniting with Raleigh’s sister has become a stressor. “It was all right at first. When I went home on leave after six months it was jolly fine to feel I’d done a little to make her pleased,” he says, slurping whiskey. “It was after I came back here [...]. I knew I’d go mad if I didn’t break the strain. I couldn’t bear being fully conscious all the time.” Once he has said this, Stanhope admits that there are “only two ways of breaking the strain.” One, he says, is pretending to be sick so that he can be sent home. The other is to drink. And since he thinks it’s a “slimy thing to go home if you’re not really ill,” he has chosen to drink.

*In this conversation, Stanhope’s tone suggests that he resents Raleigh for admiring him. When he interrupts Osborne to say that boys admire their heroes “as long as” they are still “a hero,” the audience begins to understand that Stanhope questions whether or not he actually deserves Raleigh’s reverence. In this moment, Stanhope implies that he isn’t actually a hero, despite how much Raleigh might respect him.*



*When Stanhope suggests that Raleigh’s sister mistakenly thinks he’s a hero, he confirms the notion that he doesn’t believe himself to be worthy of somebody else’s admiration. He also reveals that he uses alcohol as a coping mechanism. Indeed, he admits he’d “go mad with fright” if he wasn’t “doped with whisky.” In turn, Sherriff shows the audience Stanhope’s low opinion of himself—an opinion so low that he actually appears to somewhat invite the idea of death, as suggested by his assertion that he would rather stay in the war until his “luck” runs out than go home. If Stanhope dislikes himself so much, it’s easy to see why he might resent Raleigh for admiring him.*



*As Stanhope speaks to Osborne, he confirms once and for all that his alcoholism has developed as a crutch: in order to face the war, he has to numb himself to his own fears. This is perhaps why he has so much scorn for people who fake an illness to go home. After all, if he’s going to drink himself into poor health just to stay, it isn’t fair that other people choose the easier alternative of leaving altogether.*



Trying to make his friend feel better, Osborne says that when the war ends Stanhope can return to his old life “as fit as ever.” Stanhope agrees that he used to think the same thing, but now that Raleigh has been assigned to his company, he doesn’t think his life will be the same. This is because he’s certain Raleigh will write to his sister and tell her that Stanhope “reek[s] of whisky all day.” Osborne tries to refute this, but Stanhope says, “It’s no good, Uncle. Didn’t you see him sitting there at supper?—staring at me?—and wondering? He’s up in those trenches now—still wondering—and beginning to understand. And all these months he’s wanted to be with me out here. Poor little devil!” Despite this, Osborne maintains that Raleigh will keep liking Stanhope “through everything” because “there’s something very deep, and rather fine, about hero-worship.”

“Hero-worship be damned!” Stanhope explodes. He then decides to censor Raleigh’s letters so he can control what his lover hears about him. “You can’t read his letters,” Osborne says, but Stanhope ignores him, drunkenly rambling about crossing out anything bad Raleigh might say about him. As he does so, Osborne coaxes him to lie down. Before long, Stanhope settles into a drunken sleep, and Osborne calls Mason and tells him to wake him (Osborne) and Hibbert at certain intervals throughout the night so they can stand watch.

*When Stanhope says he worries Raleigh will write home to his sister and tell her how he (Stanhope) has become, he reveals another reason why he resents Raleigh’s presence. Not only is he unhappy Raleigh has come to his company because he doesn’t want to disappoint the young man, but he’s also nervous that Raleigh’s presence will negatively affect his life after the war. Nonetheless, Osborne remains optimistic, suggesting that certain kinds of bonds can withstand extraordinary circumstances. While the nature of Stanhope and Raleigh’s relationship will surely change as a result of its new wartime context, Osborne believes Raleigh’s respect for Stanhope will remain intact because “hero-worship” is a resilient kind of connection.*



*Amidst the discussions about Stanhope’s relationship with Raleigh, it’s easy to overlook the significance of his friendship with Osborne. Indeed, Osborne is a caring man who’s willing to let Stanhope talk out his feelings even when those feelings are fueled by drunken irrationality. What’s more, he patiently allows Stanhope to assume the position of leader, but when it all truly comes down to it, it’s not hard to see that he—Osborne—is the one keeping everything on track, as he puts Stanhope to bed and makes arrangements to ensure that the company knows what to do for the remainder of the night.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 1

The next morning, Osborne, Trotter, and Raleigh sit in the dugout eating breakfast. When Osborne asks Trotter how things are in the trenches, Trotter replies that he doesn’t like “the look of things” because of the quiet. “Standing up there in the dark last night there didn’t seem a thing in the world alive,” he says. Osborne agrees that it is rather inactive, and Trotter says, “Too damn quiet. You can bet your boots the Boche is up to something. The big attack soon, I reckon. I don’t like it, Uncle. Pass the jam.”

*In this scene, the feeling of tension and anticipation continues to mount, even as the soldiers go through their everyday lives. Sherriff juxtaposes the stress of waiting for the German attack with the mundanity of living in the calm dugout, showcasing this dynamic when Trotter swiftly transitions from talking about the Germans to asking Osborne to “pass the jam.” Terror, it seems, sits right alongside the trappings of everyday life, showing the audience just how accustomed these soldiers have become to waiting for death and calamity.*



The night before, Trotter tells Osborne at breakfast, he and Raleigh came into the dugout after their shift and saw that Stanhope had gotten up from bed to drink more whiskey. “He didn’t seem to know who I was. Uncanny, wasn’t it, Raleigh?” Trotter says, and Raleigh dejectedly mutters “Yes” with a bowed head. “He just said, ‘Better go to bed, Raleigh’—just as if Raleigh’d been a school kid,” says Trotter, who starts getting ready to go on watch again. Just before he leaves, he says that he doesn’t like this time of day because the Germans have just had their breakfast and like to send “a few whizz-bangs and rifle grenades to show” they haven’t “forgotten” the British. “Still,” he says, “I’d rather ‘ave a bang or two than this damn quiet.”

Once Osborne and Raleigh are alone, they talk about Raleigh’s first night in the trenches, and Raleigh admits that he feels as if he’s already been on the support line for “ages.” “I can’t imagine—the end of six days here,” he says. Osborne asks how the young man felt in the actual trenches, and Raleigh assures him that it wasn’t so bad, though he did find it “frightfully quiet and uncanny—everybody creeping about and talking in low voices.” This is because the Germans are only roughly 70 yards away, which Osborne likes to think of as about the same length as a rugby field. This leads the two men into a conversation about rugby, and Raleigh is thrilled to discover that Osborne used to play professional rugby for the English team.

After talking about rugby, Osborne and Raleigh talk about their German enemies. Osborne tells a story about how one of his fellow soldiers was once shot and injured in the field, and when they tried to go save him, a German officer stood up from the trenches and yelled, “Carry him!” When the British soldiers stood and started carrying their wounded man, the Germans fired Very lights so the men could see their way back. “Next day we blew each other’s trenches to blazes,” Osborne says, to which Raleigh replies, “It all seems rather—silly, doesn’t it?” Osborne agrees, and then after some silence Raleigh decides to go finish a letter.

*Stanhope’s drunken comment to Raleigh—in which he tells the young officer to “go to bed”—underscores the strange and shifting nature of their relationship. Although Stanhope hasn’t particularly warmed up to Raleigh, in this moment he reverts back to their old ways, acting as if Raleigh is still a “school kid” who needs gentle guidance. This stands in stark opposition to his otherwise gruff attitude, ultimately showing the audience that the terms of Stanhope and Raleigh’s relationship are still in flux.*



*Once again, Raleigh finds a mentor of sorts in Osborne, delighting in the fact that the older man used to play professional rugby. In this way, Osborne once again proves himself to be the unofficial leader of the company, as he not only takes care of Stanhope, but also goes out of his way to help new soldiers like Raleigh find their bearings at war. He does this by allowing Raleigh to talk about how “uncanny” it is to sit in the trenches and wait for disaster, thereby helping the young man work through some of the fear that comes along with serving in the trenches of World War I.*



*Osborne’s story highlights the futility of war, since it shows that the Germans saved a British soldier’s life only to actively undo this kindness the very next day. This, he shows Raleigh, is just the nature of war—regardless of whether or not it is “silly,” soldiers have to accustom themselves to a seemingly never-ending cycle of inaction and action, one that doesn’t ever seem to make any progress toward anything other than senseless killing.*



As Raleigh leaves, Stanhope comes in and tells him to inspect his platoon's rifles at nine o'clock. He then tells Osborne that he was recently talking to the Colonel, who told him that a German prisoner let slip that the big attack is set to happen on the 21st, which is just two days away. "Then it'll come while we're here," Osborne says. "Yes," replies Stanhope. "It'll come while we're here. And we shall be in the front row of the stalls." He then looks down at Trotter's **chart**, asking what it is. Osborne explains that it's "Trotter's plan to make the time pass by," and Stanhope asks how many hours there are until "dawn on the twenty-first." He then starts counting out the hours on the chart, saying he's going to "draw a picture of Trotter being blown up in four pieces" on the 21st.

Osborne urges Stanhope to not defile Trotter's **chart**, saying that he spent a long time making it. Stanhope agrees that Trotter probably wouldn't "see the point" in the joke anyway, since he has "no imagination." He then asks Stanhope if he thinks "life sharpens the imagination." This leads him into strangely philosophical, ponderous grounds. "Whenever I look at anything nowadays I see right through it," he says. "Looking at you now there's your uniform—your jersey—shirt—vest—then beyond that—" At this point, Osborne cuts him off, suggesting they talk about something else. Stanhope apologizes, saying that he has developed a habit of looking "right through things, and on and on—till [he] get[s] frightened and stop[s]." To this, Osborne says that everybody in the trenches seems to feel things "more keenly."

Stanhope admits he sometimes wonders if there's something wrong with him. "D'you ever get a sudden feeling that everything's going farther and farther away," he asks, "till you're the only thing in the world—and then the world begins going away—until you're the only thing in—in the universe—and you struggle to get back—and can't?" Osborne says this just sounds like a "bit of nerve strain." Stanhope is glad to hear this, saying he actually felt this feeling this morning in the trenches. The sun was coming up and he was looking over the decimated land and thinking about the "thousands of Germans" out there, all of whom must surely be "waiting and thinking." Then, suddenly, the feeling came upon him. Saying this, he barks out for Mason to bring whiskey. "So early in the morning?" Osborne asks, but Stanhope says, "Just a spot."

*Now that the soldiers have a sense of when the German attack will come, the audience might think that they can relax to a certain extent. However, it's worth noting that Stanhope doesn't know when exactly on the 21st the attack will happen, nor does he know the specifics of how it will unfold. In this way, he finds himself face-to-face with information that only provides more uncertainty. Indeed, knowing the date of the attack does nothing more than cement the sense of dread that has been mounting throughout the play, and it is perhaps for this reason that Stanhope responds by wanting to ridicule Trotter's attempt to gain some agency over the passage of time—no matter how many circles Trotter blackens, Stanhope knows there's no avoiding the inevitable violence coming their way.*



*Stanhope's strange existential musings cement the idea that he is psychologically unhinged. This is not to say that he is crazy, but rather that the stressors of war have impacted the way he sees the world. The repetition and futility of inaction and action have caused him to seek out meaning in his life. This is why he tries to "see right through" things in order to understand how everything fits together: he wants to find meaning in his life. Unfortunately, the war itself can't provide him with meaning, since it feels to him like one big cycle of anticipation, violence, and then anticipation again. As such, he desperately searches for meaning in other areas of his life, trying to make things adhere with one another in any way he can.*



*The fact that Stanhope often feels he is "the only thing in the world" underlines the ways in which he feels estranged from his environment. This is unsurprising, given that he spends his waking hours drinking himself into oblivion so as not to have to face his fears. When he looks out across the battlefield, it's no wonder he can't relate to his environment, since the field is a devastated piece of land upon which humans kill one another—a very unnatural and unrelatable setting. Instead of accepting that war is an inherently alienating environment, though, he drowns himself in liquor.*





Stanhope turns his attention to censoring Raleigh's letters, insisting to Osborne that he's going to have to do this—especially after last night, when Raleigh came downstairs and saw him in a wretched state and looked at him as if he'd "spat on him." Just then, Raleigh enters the dugout on his way to inspect his platoon's rifles. He carries a letter, asking where to put it, and Stanhope tells him to leave it unsealed on the table. Surprised, Raleigh asks why he needs to leave it open, and Stanhope tells him it's because he has to censor it. "Oh," Raleigh says, "but—I haven't said anything about—where we are." Still, Stanhope doesn't budge. "Dennis—I'm—," stammers Raleigh, but Stanhope yells, "Don't 'Dennis' me! Stanhope's my name! You're not at school! Go and inspect your rifles!" When Raleigh doesn't do anything, Stanhope barks, "D'you understand an order?"

Raleigh finally relents and puts the letter on the table without sealing it. When he leaves, Osborne says, "Good heavens, Stanhope!" Still, Stanhope holds his ground, saying it's his decision whether or not to censor the letters, and Osborne acquiesces. Despite his vehemence, though, Stanhope says, "Oh, God! I don't want to read the blasted thing!" As such, Osborne offers to read it for him. Reading through it, he tells Stanhope that the last portion is indeed about him, so he reads it aloud. However, it isn't what Stanhope expected: the content is extremely positive, singing Stanhope's praises and saying that the soldiers regard him as "the finest officer in the battalion." The final sentence reads: "I'm awfully proud to think he's my friend." Hearing this, Stanhope lowers his head and tells Osborne to seal the letter.

## ACT 2, SCENE 2

Later that afternoon, Stanhope speaks to the Sergeant-Major of the company, telling him about the impending attack. He instructs the man to hold ground, telling him that their infantry is not to retreat even under intense pressure. Eventually, the Sergeant-Major asks what will happen if the Germans surround them on all sides, including the backside (assuming that they will likely get through some other part of the British lines). "Then we advance and win the war," Stanhope states. "Win the war," says the Sergeant-Major, taking notes in a small book. "Very good, sir." When he leaves, the Colonel enters and tells Stanhope that the brigadier is almost certain the attack will happen on the 21st. He also says that the general wants them to raid the German trenches before the attack in order to capture a soldier and wring information out of him.

*Once again, Raleigh underestimates how much his relationship with Stanhope has changed. When he tries to protest Stanhope's unreasonable determination to censor his letter, he accidentally calls him Dennis, prompting Stanhope to remind him—and rightly so—that he isn't at school anymore. Indeed, Raleigh is no longer in a context in which it is appropriate to call Stanhope by his first name, and though Stanhope is being rather unfair, Raleigh still needs to behave according to the new terms of their relationship, in which he is Stanhope's inferior.*



*Even Osborne is taken aback by Stanhope's power trip. As a result, Osborne (like Raleigh) is reprimanded for not respecting Stanhope's superior role. Of course, when Stanhope actually hears Raleigh's letter, he's overcome by shame, since he assumed the worst about his young friend only to discover that Raleigh still looks up to him. In this way, the letter confirms Osborne's previous assertion that Raleigh will continue liking Stanhope because "hero-worship" is a resilient kind of relational bond.*



*Despite Stanhope's fear, he sets himself to the task of following his orders. This often means ignoring his good sense so that he can blindly accept his instructions. This is why, when the Sergeant-Major asks what they'll do if the German forces thrust beyond them, he simply states the absurd notion that they will "advance and win the war," as if winning the war is simply a matter of gaining ground and not a matter of killing the enemy. However, when the Colonel informs him that his company will have to stage a raid on the German trenches, the audience gets the opportunity to see how willingly Stanhope will accept a dangerous mission.*



Stanhope asks the Colonel when the general wants the raid to happen, and the Colonel says tonight, which Stanhope maintains is impossible. The Colonel agrees, saying that he told the general it would have to take place the following afternoon. "I suggest sending two officers and ten men," he says, explaining that tonight the troops will blow a hole in the German fences, through which the raid members will be able to slip through. "I suggest Osborne, for one," the Colonel says. When he asks Stanhope who else should go, the only person fit and emotionally stable enough to do it is Raleigh, but Stanhope tries first to send "a good sergeant." Unfortunately, the Colonel rejects this, instead urging him to choose Raleigh. Reluctantly, Stanhope agrees.

On his way out, the Colonel invites Stanhope to dine with him that night to further discuss the plans, asking if he likes fish, which has been "sent up from rail-head for supper." Once he leaves, Hibbert enters and tells Stanhope that his neuralgia has become too excruciating to ignore. "I know," replies Stanhope. "It's rotten, isn't it? I've got it like hell." This shocks Hibbert, but he pushes on nonetheless, saying, "Well, I'm sorry, Stanhope. It's no good. I've tried damned hard; but I must go down." In response, Stanhope asks *where* he plans to "go down," and Hibbert makes it clear that he wants to go to the doctor's so that he can seek out "some kind of treatment." After a moment of silence, he moves to leave, but Stanhope blocks him and says, "You're going to stay here."

Hibbert claims the doctor will surely send him to the hospital once he sees his condition, but Stanhope claims to have already spoken to the doctor and told him to not send Hibbert anywhere. This angers Hibbert, who begins to yell hysterically about his right to see a doctor and get treatment. With this, he declares that he's leaving, and he goes into the sleeping quarters of the dugout to fetch his bags. When he returns, Stanhope has unholstered his revolver. "You're going to stay here and do your job," Stanhope says. Still, Hibbert tries to get by, claiming he's in unfathomable pain. At one point, he becomes so desperate that he swings a walking stick at Stanhope, but Stanhope catches it midair and rips it from his hands. He then tells Hibbert that he has thirty seconds to decide to stay. If he tries to leave, he'll shoot him.

*Stanhope's attempt to spare Raleigh from having to lead the dangerous raid on the German trenches is evidence of his connection with the young man. No matter how hard he might try to act as if Raleigh is just another soldier—no matter how much gruff indifference he shows Raleigh—the fact of the matter is that there is a fondness between them that influences the dynamic of their military relationship, making it hard for Stanhope to send Raleigh into harm's way.*



*When Stanhope says that he too has neuralgia, the audience understands that he's trying to manipulate Hibbert into staying. Indeed, he wants to show the cowardly officer that anybody can make up excuses in order to leave. Nonetheless, Hibbert's fear of war is so overwhelming that he pushes on, insisting that he has "tried damned hard" to put up with the pain but that he can't bear it any longer. As such, Sherriff demonstrates to the audience just how desperate Hibbert is to escape his fear.*



*Once again, Stanhope appears psychologically unstable. If he's willing to shoot one of his own men, there's no telling how unhinged he must be. Of course, his aggressiveness in this moment is most likely the result of his own fear—since he himself can hardly handle the fear of life in the trenches, he deeply resents Hibbert's willingness to lie his way out of the war.*



As Stanhope and Hibbert glare at one another, Hibbert breaks into a high laugh, exclaiming, "Go on, then, shoot!" He swears he'll never again return to the trenches, and he holds his ground even when Stanhope begins counting down from fifteen. When Stanhope reaches zero, Hibbert braces to be shot, but Stanhope merely smiles, saying, "Good man, Hibbert. I liked the way you stuck that." He then urges Hibbert to stay and "see it through," but Hibbert says, "Stanhope! I've tried like hell—I swear I have. Ever since I came out here I've hated and loathed it. Every sound up there makes me all—cold and sick. I'm different to—to the others—you don't understand." In response, Stanhope merely pours Hibbert a cup of whiskey and tells him to drink it, admitting that he feels the exact same way.

*By threatening to shoot Hibbert, Stanhope proves to Hibbert that he is serious, and by withstanding the threat, Hibbert proves that he's not as cowardly as Stanhope might think. "I liked the way you stuck that," Stanhope says to Hibbert, implying that Hibbert can, in fact, withstand great pressure, despite what he might otherwise think about himself. Having proved this, Stanhope then normalizes Hibbert's fear by admitting that he too can barely get himself to remain in the trenches. In doing so, he makes Hibbert feel like he isn't so alone, using companionship as a way of inflating his courage. As such, the audience sees that Stanhope is perhaps not as unhinged as one might think, since this scene proves that he can be caring and shrewd as a leader.*



Stanhope reveals to Hibbert that the only way he himself can bear the war is by drinking. He then suggests that they go on watch together. He points out that if Hibbert *did* leave, he'd never be able to forgive himself for leaving behind men like Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh. "Don't you think it worth standing in with men like that?" he asks. Finally, Hibbert promises to try to stay, asking Stanhope to not tell anybody about their conversation.

*Stanhope's main successful tactic in trying to get Hibbert to stay is to call upon the notion of camaraderie and friendship. Rather than encouraging Hibbert to stay for vague notions of valor or pride, he implores the man to think about what it would feel like to leave good people like Raleigh and Osborne and Trotter behind. The fact that this works only further emphasizes Sherriff's interest in the powerful dynamics of friendship in difficult circumstances.*



When Hibbert leaves, Osborne enters, and Stanhope informs him that he and Raleigh will be leading the raid on the German trenches. The plan, he explains, is that Osborne will direct the procedure (overseeing the pitching of a smoke bomb) while Raleigh and ten soldiers dash into the trenches to grab hostages. Osborne accepts this, and Stanhope leaves. Soon after, Trotter comes out of the sleeping quarters and sits down to have tea with Osborne, who tells him about the raid. "I reckon the Boche are all ready waiting for it," Trotter says. "Did you 'ear about the raid just south of 'ere the other night?" When Osborne says he hasn't, Trotter explains that another British company knocked holes in the German trench wires, but by the time the soldiers arrived for the raid, the Germans were waiting for them because they knew where to expect the infiltration.

*Trotter's story about previous raids makes it even more clear that the mission Osborne and Raleigh are about to embark upon is—for lack of a better term—a death trap. As such, the sense of futility that characterizes the war (with its never-ending cycles of inaction and action) once again comes to the forefront, as Trotter frames the raid as something that will do little more than kill a number of good men.*



Osborne suggests that Trotter avoid talking to Raleigh about the raid, saying that the young boy doesn't need to know the mission is so grim. Trotter then asks Osborne what he's reading, and Osborne shows him the book: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This surprises Trotter, who can't wrap his head around why a grown man would read a children's book. "Have you read it?" asks Osborne, and Trotter says, "No!" Osborne then urges him to read the book and reads a passage aloud, leaving his friend somewhat dumbstruck until, finally, Trotter says, "I don't see no point in that." In response, Osborne says, "Exactly. That's just the point."

*The satisfaction that Osborne derives from reading Alice's Adventures in Wonderland comes from the fact that the book celebrates—or at least interrogates—the notion of meaninglessness. Whereas Stanhope (for instance) searches desperately for meaning in his otherwise futile and dismal wartime life, Osborne simply accepts the senselessness of war, knowing that searching for meaning in meaningless things only leads to existential unease. Unfortunately, Trotter can't see this point, which is rather unsurprising, given that he too seeks to add meaning to his wartime life by trying to assert a sense of control over the passage of time.*



Stanhope comes into the dugout and fetches Hibbert from the sleeping quarters, and together they go on watch. After they leave, Trotter tells Osborne that Hibbert's eyes were so red that he thinks he may have been crying. Not wanting to talk anymore, Osborne asks Trotter if he might let him write a letter in peace, and Trotter sets to writing his own. Just then, Raleigh excitedly rushes in and says that Stanhope told him about the raid. "I say," he says, "it's most frightfully exciting!" He then asks Osborne if the two of them were "specially" chosen for the job, and when Osborne confirms that they were, he proudly exclaims, "I say!"

*Raleigh's excitement arises from his naiveté. Indeed, he sees being chosen to lead the raid as a great honor, not stopping to consider the fact that this means he must carry out a highly dangerous mission. However, his excitement may also come from the fact that the raid gives him a chance to stop waiting for something to happen. While the other men have all experienced the cycles of inaction and action that take place during trench warfare, Raleigh has only sat in wretched anticipation. As such, the raid gives him something to look forward to, finally allowing him to do something.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 1

Near sunset the following day, Stanhope paces the dugout and speaks with the Colonel, who tells him that headquarters has told him the raid must take place before 7pm. When Stanhope asks why, the Colonel says, "They've got some conference to arrange the placing of reserves." In response, Stanhope guesses, "They can't have it later because of dinner, I suppose." He also guesses that the Germans are simply waiting with their guns drawn for the raid to happen, but the Colonel merely says he can't disobey orders. As they go through the plan once more—the Colonel telling Stanhope they'll question the German prisoner right away—Osborne and Raleigh enter the dugout. Stanhope encourages the Colonel to go speak to the rest of the men who will be carrying out the raid, and though he's hesitant at first, Stanhope convinces him that it will be good for their morale.

*Unlike Stanhope, the Colonel doesn't have much at stake in the raid. Indeed, he doesn't have personal relationships with the men who are venturing into danger, so he only stands to benefit from the mission, since he'll be able to report any modicum of success to his superiors. As such, Sherriff presents the Colonel as a man obsessed with following orders, somebody who copes with the stressors of military life by carrying out his tasks without question, even when this means sending men to their death.*



On his way out, the Colonel wishes Osborne and Raleigh good luck, saying he'll recommend them for awards if they succeed and reminding them how important it is to bring at least one hostage back. The Colonel and Stanhope turn to leave, but Osborne calls Stanhope back and places his wedding ring, watch, and a letter on the table and asks Stanhope to make sure they get to his wife if anything happens to him. "You're coming back, old man," Stanhope says. "Damn it! what on earth should I do without you?"

After Stanhope leaves, Osborne and Raleigh try to pass the time before the raid. They only have six minutes, but it ticks along at an excruciatingly slow pace. Sitting at the table, they both yawn and feel "empty." In the intervening time, they make idle chit-chat, which Raleigh periodically interrupts by asking questions about the raid, though they've decided to focus on other things until the actual event. Eventually, Osborne quotes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a distraction, and Raleigh finishes the passage, adding a final couplet to the rhyme. "Now we're off!" Osborne says, and the two men start talking about pigs in the forests where Raleigh grew up. Apparently, Osborne is familiar with the area. Next, they discuss what they'll have when they get back from the raid, and Osborne lets slip that the higher-ups have procured two bottles of champagne, six cigars, and a fresh chicken.

Finally, the time comes for Osborne and Raleigh to depart for the raid. On their way out, Raleigh notices Osborne's ring on the table and says, "I say, here's your ring." "Yes," replies Osborne. "I'm—leaving it here. I don't want the risk of losing it." "Oh!" says Raleigh, and a tense silence ensues as he puts the ring on the table again. "I'm glad it's you and I—together, Raleigh," Osborne says. "Are you—really?" asks Raleigh. When Osborne reaffirms that he is indeed glad to be carrying out the raid with him, Raleigh says, "So am I—awfully." Agreeing that they "must put up a good show," they put on their helmets and exit the dugout.

*In the face of uncertainty, Stanhope can do nothing but assume a false sense of confidence, assuring Osborne that he will return safely. "You're coming back, old man," he says, but it soon becomes clear that this is something he needs to tell himself, since he doesn't know what he would do "without" Osborne. As such, Sherriff highlights once again the bond Stanhope has with Osborne, showing the audience the vital importance and sustaining qualities of friendship during war.*



*Again, Sherriff puts on display the friendly relationship Raleigh has developed with Osborne. One even gets the sense that Osborne has taken on a certain fatherly role in his connection with Raleigh, who clearly looks up to him and sees him as wise, as evidenced by the fact that he keeps asking him questions about what the raid will be like. But the best way to pass the time, they find, is to bond over shared experiences, once again suggesting that friendship and camaraderie can help people get through difficult psychological circumstances.*



*For the first time, Raleigh picks up on the inkling of doubt working through Osborne's head regarding whether or not they will survive the raid. Whereas Osborne has until this point been a steady source of reassurance, in this moment Raleigh recognizes that his friend is perhaps just as unsure about the raid as anybody else. In order to keep Raleigh in good spirits, though, Osborne once again calls upon the connection they've established, telling Raleigh that he's glad they're going on the mission together. Fortunately, this helps Raleigh put aside his fears, allowing him to focus on camaraderie rather than on the possibility of disaster.*





The dugout remains silent until the smoke bomb explodes overhead, accompanied by a thrum of machine-gun fire. The commotion escalates, though it remains muffled by the earthen walls of the dugout. After several moments, the noises abate, and Stanhope's voice rises into the air. "All right, sir," he says. "Come down quickly!" In response, the Colonel's voice calls out, asking how many soldiers were captured. "Only one," Stanhope says. As the Sergeant-Major wrestles a young German soldier down the steps of the dugout, Stanhope goes to check on the men. Meanwhile, the Colonel and Sergeant-Major confiscate a notebook from the German, giving the Colonel great pleasure, as he believes his superiors will be quite pleased with the results of the raid.

Stanhope slowly comes down the dugout stairs, and the Colonel says, "Splendid, Stanhope! We've got all we wanted [...]. I must go right away and 'phone the brigadier. He'll be very pleased about it. It's a feather in our cap, Stanhope." With a "look of astonishment," Stanhope says in a "dead" voice, "How awfully nice—if the brigadier's pleased." Coming to his senses, the Colonel remembers to ask how the men fared, asking if they're "all safely back." In response, Stanhope answers that Raleigh and four men returned safely, but that Osborne—along with six other men—have died. Osborne, it seems, was killed by a hand grenade while waiting for Raleigh to come out with the hostage. At this point, Raleigh enters the dugout in a daze, and the Colonel congratulates him before leaving.

Raleigh sits on Osborne's bed, and once he and Stanhope are alone, they look at each other in silence, the Very lights shining in faintly from above the trenches. After a moment, Stanhope says in an "expressionless" voice, "Must you sit on Osborne's bed?" With this, he climbs the dugout steps, leaving Raleigh alone as "heavy guns" thud through the air in the distance.

*Unsurprisingly, the Colonel's first thought after the raid is about whether or not it was successful. Rather than checking on the men who actually carried out the mission, he immediately goes to the prisoner and begins the process of interrogating him. Stanhope, on the other hand, is clearly worried for his friends, so he retreats to check on them. In this way, Sherriff reveals each character's priorities, once more casting the Colonel as an uncaring man obsessed with carrying out his duties.*



*The fact that the Colonel sees the raid as a "feather in [his] cap" aligns with the notion that he is a man preoccupied with carrying out his orders. Stanhope, on the other hand, is distraught to discover that Osborne has died. This is because Osborne was in many ways the person who helped keep him maintain even the slightest amount of psychological stability. Now, without his wise friend, Stanhope has nobody to help him when he gets too drunk and nobody with whom he can speak candidly about his fear.*



*It's worth remembering that Osborne often acted as a mediator of sorts between Stanhope and Raleigh. Indeed, he tried to prepare Raleigh to deal with a new version of his old friend, and he often spoke with Stanhope about Raleigh, assuring the captain that Raleigh would still admire him despite the difficult wartime circumstances. Now, though, Osborne is gone, and Stanhope is at a loss for how to interact with Raleigh. Unable to navigate these interpersonal grounds, he resorts to indifference, telling Raleigh to get off Osborne's bed and leaving the shaken young boy alone.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 2

That night, Trotter, Stanhope, and Hibbert enjoy the fresh chicken, the bottles of champagne, and the cigars brought in by the higher-ups to celebrate the completed raid. They each get drunk and talk about women, telling jokes and even looking at suggestive pictures Hibbert carries at all times. Before long, Stanhope brings out a bottle of whiskey, pouring it out for his fellow officers. As he does this, Trotter says he'll finish his whiskey and then go relieve Raleigh, wondering aloud why the boy never came down to eat with them. "That lad's too keen on his 'duty,'" Hibbert says. "He told me he liked being up there with the men better than down here with us." Stanhope can't believe his ears, seemingly indignant to hear such an insult. Trotter, for his part, says, "I reckon that raid shook 'im up more'n we thought."

Talking about the raid works Stanhope into anger, so he tells his officers to go to bed. However, Hibbert is so drunk he doesn't recognize Stanhope's indignation, instead cheekily suggesting that Stanhope should go to bed. "Clear out of here!" Stanhope shouts, and Hibbert stumbles to the sleeping quarters, leaving Stanhope with Trotter, who is preparing to relieve Raleigh. Once alone, Stanhope tells Mason to bring Raleigh's supper, but when Raleigh finally arrives, the young officer admits he has already eaten with the other soldiers. "You eat the men's rations when there's barely enough for each man?" Stanhope asks. "They asked me to share," Raleigh says, and this comment sparks an argument about whether or not it's appropriate for Raleigh to eat with his men.

"You insulted Trotter and Hibbert by not coming," Stanhope tells Raleigh. After a moment of silence, Raleigh says, "I'm awfully sorry, Dennis, if—if I annoyed you by coming to your company." He then accuses Stanhope of resenting his presence. Stanhope brushes this off and tells Raleigh to eat his dinner before it goes cold. "Good God!" Raleigh finally erupts. "Don't you understand? How *can* I sit down and eat that—when—when Osborne's lying—out there—" Stanhope stands up when he hears this, and his next words are broken by labored breathing. "My God!" he shouts. "You bloody little swine! You think I don't care—you think you're the only soul that cares!" In response, Raleigh points out that Stanhope is down here drinking and feasting, but Stanhope interrupts him, saying, "To forget! You think there's no limit to what a man can bear?"

*The fact that Stanhope parties in great excess on the very same night that his friend has died comes as no surprise, since the audience has seen that this is how he deals with hardship. Indeed, rather than facing his emotions, he drowns them with champagne and whiskey. However, he can't quite stomach the idea that Raleigh doesn't want to eat with them, perhaps because Raleigh's refusal to indulge makes him feel guilty for not mourning Osborne in a more appropriate manner.*



*The argument that Stanhope and Raleigh have in this scene calls upon the tension that has been lurking between them since Raleigh first arrived in the dugout. Although there have been several moments of friendliness between them, for the most part it's clear that Stanhope has never gotten over his resentment of the fact that Raleigh found his way into his company. By finally allowing their tension to come to a head, Sherriff demonstrates the complex nature of friendship, confirming once more that relationships often undergo difficult transformations when they are brought into new contexts.*



*Finally, Stanhope reveals to Raleigh why he acts the way he acts: to ignore his demons. Whereas Raleigh may have thought Stanhope is a callous man content to have a grand party the very night his friend has died, in this moment he learns that this is simply the only way Stanhope knows how to cope with hardship. Indeed, Stanhope admits that there is a "limit to what a man can bear," and it's clear that he himself has found that limit. In order to go on, it seems, he has to drink himself into oblivion.*



Realizing the effect of his words on Stanhope, Raleigh apologizes, saying, “I’m awfully sorry, Dennis—I—I didn’t understand.” Stanhope makes no reply, so Raleigh tries again. “You don’t know how—I—” he says, but Stanhope cuts him off by asking him to go away. “Can’t I—” Raleigh begins. “Oh, get out!” shouts Stanhope. “For God’s sake, get out!”

*In this moment, Raleigh clearly wants to have an open conversation with Stanhope. When he tries to talk, though, Stanhope cuts him off. Nonetheless, it’s evident that he wants to have a frank talk about the grief of losing Osborne. After all, both he and Stanhope feel this grief, so they should be able to commiserate. Unfortunately, though, Stanhope remains unable to do this, opting instead to numb himself to the pain. As such, he isolates himself from the last true friendship he has available to him.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 3

The candles that have been lighting the dugout are no longer burning. It is dawn on the following day, and Stanhope is still in bed. Mason gently wakes him and gives him tea. Trotter, for his part, has already gotten dressed and woken up Hibbert and Raleigh. Soon enough the Sergeant-Major arrives, and Stanhope tells him to make sure all of the men are in the trenches with their platoons and prepared for the attack. As he orders people back and forth, Stanhope pours whiskey into his tea and remains in the dugout. Just as Trotter is about to leave, the soldiers hear the sound of falling shells. “Better go up, Trotter,” Stanhope says. “Call the others.” He then tells Trotter to send a soldier to periodically tell him how things are going.

*In this scene, Stanhope has apparently slept in. Already, then, the audience can see the effect of Osborne’s death on him, since Osborne was in many ways the only person helping Stanhope go on functioning despite his alcoholism. It’s also worth noting that Stanhope orders his men to join the fighting but as of yet has made no move toward leaving the dugout himself—perhaps an indication that his fear is keeping him from fulfilling his soldierly duties.*



When Raleigh goes up, he turns and says, “Cheero—Stanhope.” From where he sits, Stanhope doesn’t raise his head, merely saying, “Cheero, Raleigh. I shall be coming up soon.” The sound of artillery and bombs is quite steady now, and Stanhope calls to Hibbert, who emerges looking quite haggard and pale. “You want me to go up now?” he asks, and Stanhope says, “Of course I do.” Still, Hibbert asks for some water because the champagne from the night before has dried his mouth. The sound above the dugout has become very intense, but Hibbert drinks water slowly. “There’s no appalling hurry, is there?” he asks Stanhope. “No hurry!” Stanhope says. “Why d’you think the others have gone up?” At this point, even Mason is ready to join the fighting, and so Stanhope tells Hibbert to go with him. Chaos abounds above, and shouts for a stretcher reach the dugout.

*Interestingly enough, the very coping mechanism Stanhope forced on Hibbert by suggesting that he drown his fears with alcohol is now backfiring, as Hibbert uses his hangover as an excuse to delay joining the fight above. As such, it seems that drinking actually won’t help him overcome his fears, and perhaps never has. In fact, what kept him from leaving the trenches wasn’t Stanhope’s suggestion that he drink, but Stanhope’s camaraderie. After all, Stanhope took a new interest in Hibbert after their conversation about their fears. In this way, Sherriff once again spotlights the vitalizing effects of friendship during war. Unfortunately, though, Hibbert must now face the inevitable violence, and Stanhope is doing nothing to encourage him other than shouting at him to leave the dugout.*



The Sergeant-Major enters the dugout and fills Stanhope in on what's happening, telling him that a soldier has been badly wounded. As he informs him of this, yet another call for the stretcher sounds into the air. At this, the Sergeant-Major bounds up the steps, and when he returns, he tells Stanhope that Raleigh has been hit in the spine by a shell and can't move his legs. Stanhope orders him to bring Raleigh down into the dugout, and when he reappears, he has Raleigh cradled in his arms. "'E's fainted, sir. 'E was conscious when I picked 'im up,'" the Sergeant-Major says, placing Raleigh on Osborne's bed. Stanhope orders him to go get two men with the stretcher, and though the Sergeant-Major tries to point out that they'll never be able to get Raleigh to a hospital in these conditions, Stanhope yells at him to follow orders.

When the Sergeant-Major leaves, Raleigh wakes up and is in a rather jovial mood, greeting Stanhope as if nothing terrible has happened. "Hullo—Dennis," he says. "Well, Jimmy," Stanhope says, smiling, "you got one quickly." Raleigh admits that he doesn't remember coming into the dugout. Regardless, he says, he simply got "winded" after something knocked him over, but he claims he's all right now, and he tries to get up. Luckily, Stanhope keeps him from rising. "I say—Dennis," he says. "It—it hasn't gone through, has it?" Telling the truth, Stanhope informs Raleigh that the shell did indeed go through him. He then promises that he's going to have him taken to the hospital and, eventually, home. "I can't go home just for—for a knock in the back," Raleigh says, fidgeting around until he moves in a way that tweaks his injury, at which point he howls in pain.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Raleigh begins to understand that he can't move his legs. "Dennis—" he whispers after a moment of silence. "Could we have a light? It's—it's so frightfully dark and cold." Immediately wanting to accommodate the boy's needs, Stanhope rises and searches for a candle, promising to also bring another blanket. For a moment, he leaves Raleigh alone in the room, and Raleigh releases an indistinguishable sound, "something between a sob and a moan." When Stanhope returns, he puts the blanket on Raleigh and asks, "Is that better, Jimmy?" Unfortunately, Raleigh doesn't make a sound, and Stanhope stares at him for a while before standing once more and putting the candle back on the table.

*When Raleigh is injured, Stanhope shows him special attention by ordering that he be brought out of the trenches and into the dugout. This is perhaps the first time that he gives Raleigh special treatment, an indication that their relationship is in fact quite important to him. In fact, it's so important to him that he wants to use a stretcher to take Raleigh to a hospital—a ludicrous idea, one that underlines just how much Stanhope truly does care for Raleigh.*



*When Stanhope says, "Well, Jimmy, you got one quickly," he calls Raleigh by his first name for the first time throughout the entire play. In doing so, he finally acknowledges their familiarity, drawing upon their past friendship in order to comfort the injured boy. Taken in conjunction with his previous conversation with Hibbert—in which he established a friendly connection in order to discourage Hibbert from leaving—this moment solidifies the notion that Stanhope often uses camaraderie and friendship as a way of comforting and emboldening his soldiers. In turn, it's clear he understands just how important relationships are in difficult circumstances, though he previously has been incapable of bringing himself to show Raleigh the kind of friendly affection he does now.*



*In this moment, Stanhope loses yet another friend. In turn, he is left completely alone with his fear. What's more, it's worth noting that he still has yet to join his men in the trenches, instead preoccupying himself in the dugout. Of course, he has for the past few minutes been treating Raleigh, but his overall participation in the battle has been quite low so far, once again reminding the audience that he is stricken with fear and struggling to get himself to venture into harm's way.*



Above, the sounds of the attack rage louder and louder. Finally, a soldier rushes down and tells Stanhope that Trotter has asked that he “come at once.” Stanhope sends him away, promising he’s on his way, and when he’s alone, he pauses one last time over Osborne’s bed and “runs his fingers over Raleigh’s tousled hair.” Having done this, he finally climbs the steps, pausing for a moment as his form is silhouetted against the dawn sky. Several moments later, there comes a high-pitch sound followed by a massive explosion, the force of which extinguishes the candle on the table and splinters the wooden supports of the dugout, sending puffs of sand into the air as the entire space begins its slow collapse.

*The complete and inescapable chaos of this final moment in Journey's End is what the soldiers have been waiting for the entire time. Each day, they've waited with bated breath for this kind of disaster to befall them. Now that the German attack has finally descended upon them, though, one gets the sense that those who survive will inevitably go on waiting for the next period of violence. Indeed, Sherriff doesn't actually provide the audience with the “journey's end,” but rather stops the play in the middle of the very thing for which everybody has been waiting, thereby emphasizing the never-ending quality of war and the sense that violent conflict is nothing but a repetitious cycle.*







## HOW TO CITE

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