

WALLPAPER

WALLPAPER – BACKGROUND STORY

*** Note: this document contains “spoilers” if you have not experienced the work yet.**

Story Summary

Our main character is Philip James Sanders (PJ). He was born in 1960 to Mary and Eddie – he grew up in Dalton Manor – built by his great grandfather in 1773 on the Yorkshire Moors. The Georgian family home had once been a well-appointed house of the gentry, but its use changed over the years. During the 2nd world war it housed American soldiers like his dad.

During PJ’s growing up Dalton Manor had become quite run down and shabby. Occasionally his mother would take in a lodger but generally it was just him and his mother as his father had long since died.

He couldn’t wait to grow up and leave the quiet and remote moors. After a scholarship to a top American University. PJ stayed in the States developing a career in computer engineering, coming back occasionally to the UK to visit his elderly mother.

WALLPAPER picks up on PJ’s story as he comes back to Dalton Manor shortly after his mother has died. As the only child he needs to wind up the family home and sort out the estate. Visiting the empty house gives PJ a chance to explore his past and try to make sense of some of the secrets in the house.

PJ has taken leave from where he works – Poppitech – based in Silicon Valley and intends to use his latest prototype gadget to help him unearth the secrets of his past.

Character Profiles:

Philip James Sanders (PJ)

Philip James Sanders is the only remaining child of Mary and Eddie he was born in 1960. PJ grew up in a lonely atmosphere, his mother was distant and not very engaged with him. His father died when he was 4, although he remembered his father, vague memories of being shouted at, he has no memory of his lost twin sister Grace, and she was never mentioned in his growing up. However as he gets older PJ has a sense that something is missing.

At the first opportunity in 1978, PJ leaves Dalton Manor, with his Father's status as a former American serviceman PJ won a scholarship for a University place in California aged 18.

After a few jobs PJ finally begins a career at a technology company in Silicon Valley called Poppitech. He has always found women difficult to understand and carries a strange sense of loss with him that stops him from getting too close to women. Martha was the exception – but like his mother Mary, when she miscarried, she changed and the relationship fell apart. PJ preferred no strings attached dates or to just not bother.

As the only child of an aging mother he tried his best to stay in touch but he knew deep down that he had escaped to California to get away from her and everything Dalton Manor stood for. At the point his mother dies, PJ is 55 years old, single and with no dependants. Going back to Dalton Manor is a chore but he wants to explore some of the feelings around this place before it sells and is gone from the matriarchal family line forever.

Mary Rose Hall (Sanders)

Mary Rose Hall was born in 1922 in Dalton Manor. In the early years she thought her parents were Elizabeth and Joseph Hall, but later on in life she found out that her mother actually was Anna the servant who went on to marry Mary's father. Mary spent her whole life at Dalton Manor despite getting accepted into London Art College aged 16 She never attended as she had lied about her age, and didn't really have the family support to make it work. Her father, a real traditionalist thought her role

was at home. Mary was 22 when her dad died and 24 when her mum died. During the Second World War American service men were moved into Dalton Manor. Mary and her mother Anna were paid to housekeep them. In 1946 after the war Mary married American soldier Eddie Sanders. Shortly after the wedding Mary's mum Anna died.

Mary and Eddie tried for many years for a family. Mary had a succession of miscarriages over a decade until 1960 when she gave birth to twins, Philip and Grace. Grace died in an accident at 4 years old. Mary blotted her out as she couldn't cope with the grief of losing her long awaited daughter. Then a year later in 1964 when she lost her husband Eddie she became very reclusive.

Mary followed her mother's footsteps with an interest in spiritualism and held séances at Dalton Manor to get in touch with her mother and find out about her daughter. The rest of the time she painted, grew flowers and tried in a quite emotionally detached way to bring up her son PJ.

Mary wanted to die young like her mother, father and husband, but she lived on until she was 92. She refused to go into a home and died, on her own at Dalton Manor in her sleep.

Eddie Sanders

Eddie Sanders was born in 1920 in California. He went into the US Army and at the age of 22 was sent to the UK where he was stationed at Dalton Manor. He was keen to get out and fight Hitler and frustrated by 'idle time' in the Yorkshire Moors. The bonus was he fell in love with the beautiful English rose Mary Hall and in 1946 they married. He wanted children and blamed Mary for all their miscarriages, until in 1960 he became the proud father of twins, Philip and Grace.

Although Eddie made frequent trips back to the US, he fell in love with Dalton Manor and felt he'd found his spiritual home.

He didn't deal well with his wife's grief, losing her mother then her daughter, she withdrew into herself and her parlour of spirits. He loved PJ but felt he needed to be strict both as mother and father, sometimes this strictness was a bit too much but he did his best.

Eddie fell off a ladder building a greenhouse and died aged only 44 years old.

Anna (Smith) Hall

Anna Smith Was born in 1903, At the age of 10, she moved into service at Dalton Manor.

At the age of 19 in 1922 she fell pregnant by Joseph Hall owner of Dalton Manor. He was married to the lady of the house, Elizabeth who couldn't bear children - so baby Mary was brought up as Elizabeth's child. It wasn't until Elizabeth died of pneumonia in 1926, that Anna then married Joseph and could fully be Mary's mother again.

Anna never felt complete - she missed her family when she went into service and she missed the acknowledgement of her daughter being hers in Mary's early years. Anna died at 43 years old in 1946, her only child Mary was 24 years old - some said Anna never recovered from the death of Joseph 4 years before.

Anna was always interested in spiritualism and although it contradicted her husband's Catholicism. He turned a blind eye to her use of séances with the local 'busybodies' in the parlour.

Joseph William Hall

Joseph William Hall was born in 1892, at the age of 25 he married Elizabeth 1917 during the war, but was never happy in the marriage and despite being a devout Catholic, had various affairs, one with servant Anna who had his child. His wife Elizabeth died when he was 34. He then married Anna Smith who became Anna Hall. In 1942 he was conscripted to fight in the Second World War and was killed in action in the same year. William Hall fought in both world wars.

Jane Richardson-Smith

Head of HR at Poppitech, Jane is symbolic of a lot of what PJ has grown to detest about the organisation. She is PR through and through, with her high heels and immaculate make up, she has no interest in technical innovation but is out to reach the Board room in any way she can.

Grace

PJ's dead twin sister manifests as a clingy spirit trying to reconnect with her brother who has grown up and moved away.

Organisation profile:

Poppitech

PJ has been granted leave from Poppitech based in Silicon Valley,

Poppitech started up in the 1990s dot com era as an online marketing company, but in 2007, they changed direction developing an extensive range of quality, high performance commercial products for communications, optical surveillance and radar positioning applications.

At the time of his mother's death PJ is working on a prototype beta product of a Visual Memory Extractor (VME) which extracts visual memories out of walls. The VME attempts to visually re-construct events based on what it finds from within four meters of its sensors being attached to a wall or surface. With advanced technology sensors and the latest in surveillance technology the VME is a pioneering method of evidence gathering. Poppitech wants to release the product into a domestic market and is exploring the potential for how it can combine targeted advertising.

PJ brings his prototype device to Dalton Manor... Its targeted advertising even profiles him much against his will - giving our audience an insight into PJs character.

Within WALLPAPER, PJ plays with the VME and the results form an important part of the story.

WHY WALLPAPER?

There is something really interesting about the history of wallpaper – its place in our lives and culture. Decorative paper that smooths over the cracks, bringing colour into another wise bland space.

For most of its history wallpaper has been the poor relation of the decorative arts: because it is fragile, ephemeral, and easy to replace it has often disappeared from the historical record. This absence of archival history seemed to resonate with stories lost in walls that no one has thought to capture before now.

The parallels between wallpaper as a commodity and the hidden stories of the main character and his ancestors in the Manor house has a strong parallel.

Wallpaper is often thought of as 'background' rather than foreground – like those incidental stories that are attached to everyday items that pepper our lives. Nevertheless, its role in the overall decorative scheme is a vital one, and the choice of wallpaper affects the mood and style of a room, and may influence the choice of other furnishings. The wallpaper itself may be indicative of the function of a room, and will often reflect the age, status or gender of its inhabitants or habitual occupants. In WALLPAPER the story we peel through the layers of paper to unearth the stories of times gone by.

Often wallpaper is designed to look like something else – tapestry, velvet, chintz, silk drapery, linen, wood, masonry, a mural. Just like the families can convey a social norm while under the veneer are cracks and flaws. Prior to the 18th century tapestries would adorn the walls of the wealthy.

Wallpaper became an affordable substitute for more costly materials and suffered for being seen as a cheap imitation.

Madame de Genlis (in 1760) bemoaned the frivolous fashion for English wallpapers which had driven the Gobelin tapestries out of style. Wallpaper itself comes to stand for a decline in values, both moral and social:

'In the old days, when people built, they built for two or three hundred years; the house was furnished with tapestries made to last as long as the building; the trees they planted were their children's heritage; they were sacred woodlands. Today forests are felled, and children are left with debts, paper on their walls, and new houses that fall to pieces!'

Wallpaper becomes a metaphor for dishonesty as opposed to the secure and lasting, and for the valuing of appearance over substance. We paper over the cracks.

The generations of the Sanders family who lived in Dalton Manor spanned the social classes from upper class respected gentry through to illegitimate children from the servants. The house homed them all and alongside the walls were decorated accordingly in the early 19th century Dalton Manor enjoyed wallpaper as a luxurious and elegant commodity, but towards the end of the century in line with machine printing and repeal of excise duty wallpaper became more modest and in reach of the lower class residents who took over Dalton Manor.

In thinking up the WALLPAPER story we liked the links often associated with cleanliness and comfort, wallpaper become a kind of short-hand symbol for home and domesticity, readily co-opted by writers, artists, and advertisers. In her story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins-Gilman memorably employed wallpaper to symbolise the claustrophobia and repressive control that a creative woman might experience within the confines of her home and family.

For us we wanted to create a home that had a history that had layers that could be peeled back – we wanted to tell our protagonists story in a multi-layered way through texture, colour and an illusion of hiding the cracks.