

*Septimus Smythe*

SEPTIMUS SMYTHE  
AND THE  
SPECTRE DETECTORS

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*Septimus Smythe*





“Spooks and spectres! Whatever next? I don’t know whether I’m coming or going!”

Septimus looked at his reflection in the ticket booth window and watched in dismay as he disappeared, only to reappear a few seconds later.

“Now you see me, now you don’t! This really will NOT do!”

He closed his eyes tightly and screwed up his face in deep concentration, trying to control the tingling sensation, but he just did not seem to have the knack any more.

The other ghosts had tried to cheer him up.

“You have been a ghost for a very long time and it has been a very busy season. You just need a rest. After all, you are the main attraction at the castle!”

Septimus opened his eyes now and looked at the poster on the ticket booth.

*Septimus Smythe*

There he stood with his head tucked underneath his arm, an eerie mist swirling around him. It was the ability to remove and replace his head that made him so important: no other ghost at the castle could boast about having had his head chopped off on the orders of a king!

Septimus thought back to the time when he had served King Henry VIII at court. At first, life had been so enjoyable, the palace echoed with the sounds of laughter and merriment and Septimus could do no wrong as far as His Majesty was concerned. It was all that business with the wives that changed things. King Henry became suspicious and moody. The slightest thing upset him and those close to him were never sure what he might do next. It was when the King was in a particularly black mood one day that he lost his temper with poor Septimus.

“Off with his head!” shouted King Henry, and kings never went back on their word.

So here was Septimus Smythe, tall and handsome, wearing doublet and hose and a hat with a large feather. The bloodstains on his frilly collar had faded to a pale brown but

still helped to give him a certain notoriety that made him a favourite with the tourists. Recently though, there had been problems.

He had begun to have trouble removing his head. He was often late arriving in the library and was alarmed to discover that gliding through the bookcase did not come easily any more. The worry began to keep him awake at night.



The heavy wooden doors slowly swung shut. There was a clatter of chains and a clanking of keys as the castle closed for the off-season and the castle owner walked across the car park, humming a happy little tune as he thought of his holiday to come. Moments later, his rusty old car rumbled over the drawbridge and rattled off down the lane.



The sun was setting over the sea. Towering above, on the cliff top, the ancient castle

stood silhouetted against the evening sky. All day, visitors had tramped round chattering excitedly about what they had seen, but now, inside the great hall, there was an eerie stillness.

Suddenly, a little breeze sprang up from nowhere and whistled noisily through the keyhole. It gently swayed the tapestries, which hung from the ceiling on long poles. At the far end of the hall was a door hidden behind a heavy curtain. Now, from behind that curtain floated a swirling mist moving around the room then hovering in a corner as the figure of a man slowly began to appear. He was a strange sight to see; his long black hair plaited in a pigtail down his back. Over one eye, he wore a patch and dangling from his ears were gold hoops. He was dressed in a striped jersey and navy breeches. As he began to move across the room, it became clear that he had only one proper leg. A wooden peg served for the other and he leaned heavily on a crutch. He stopped by a small table on which stood a battered, brass ship's bell, salvaged from the shipwreck when

he perished many years before. He rang it continuously as loudly as he could.

Now from every corner of the castle they came; some were gliding, some running, one walking slowly dragging a heavy ball and chain behind him. There was chattering and ghostly laughter but a sorrowful sighing and a gentle moaning too, as the ghosts of the castle gathered for their Annual General Meeting in the Great Hall.



Horace, the ghostly sailor, stopped ringing the bell and waited for silence. Fourteen pairs of eyes rested on him.

“Ahoy there! Welcome everyone. Tonight, we have some very urgent and important business to discuss. Poor Septimus hasn’t been feeling very well lately,” he began. Septimus shuffled uncomfortably as all eyes turned to look at him.

“Well, I think we should try to think of a way to help before he loses his job,” went on Horace.

Murmurs of agreement echoed round the hall. When Septimus heard this, he felt much better, so he settled back in his chair to listen as his friends put forward their ideas. Eventually it was decided that what he needed was a holiday! Well, a sort of working holiday really, far away from the castle, where he could practise his haunting skills and do his spectrecises (exercises especially for ghosts) in peace.

“But where shall I go?” asked Septimus, trying not to sound ungrateful for their concern. There was silence for a moment, and then a tall thin ghost called Edward rose to his feet. He had once been the castle librarian until that fateful day when a heavy bookcase had toppled on top of him. He held up a newspaper left behind by a visitor.

“Houses for sale; empty houses – there are lots of them in here. Let’s find Septimus a nice place in the country where he won’t be disturbed!”

Eagerly, the ghosts gathered round as he read out the details and eventually a shortlist of three properties was drawn up.

“Just in case,” explained Edward. “If you find the first place has been sold you can always move on.”

It was agreed. Septimus would leave the next evening and travel overnight. Edward promised to look in the library for a map to guide him on his journey.

That night, for the first time in weeks, Septimus slept soundly, happy that the future was looking brighter after all.