
B2 · UPPER-INTERMEDIATE

God S Secret

Full version reader.

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Fiction · B2 · Upper-Intermediate · Apex English Graded Readers

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How to use this reader

Read each chapter once without stopping, and don't worry about every word. Then read it again slowly and underline the language you want to keep. Use the **Ask the teacher** page at the end for your notes, doubts and favourite lines, and bring them to your next Apex class.

Chapter 1

It looked like a beautiful palace or a very big hotel. But it wasn't made of stone; it was made of clouds: immense, milky-white clouds. When I reached the doors, they opened automatically; but perhaps they floated open - I can't say.

I entered an enormous hall. It was so high and so wide that I felt dizzy. It seemed that I was standing on air. A bright light - like sunlight but not sunlight - reflected from the walls of cloud - or were they made of snow? Then, far away on the other side of the hall, I saw somebody behind a large reception desk.

'This is like a hotel,' I thought as I walked towards it. 'But what a hotel! It's beautiful! This must be heaven.'

It was a long walk but I was smiling to myself all the way. I felt very happy now. I thought, you tried to be a good person all your life. You always did your best to help people, to do good things, and to love your neighbour. You always knew that you would go to heaven. And now here you are!

Yes, I felt so happy that I wanted to sing. I think I did sing! Quietly, of course. I didn't want to disturb the peace and silence of heaven. I stopped at the reception desk where a man of about forty-five was waiting for me. He wore a green suit of shiny material, like plastic, and a beautiful golden cloak. He looked up at me.

I told him. He found it on a computer.

'We need some details about you,' he said. 'When were you born?'

'When did you die? The exact time, please.'

'Early this morning, I think. About 5.30. But I'm not sure about it because I was dead.' I smiled.

The receptionist looked at me coldly. He was English. Calm, polite.

I told him. Then he wanted details about my family and friends, my habits, my favourite food in fact, everything about my life. It was like an interrogation. But I felt very relaxed and friendly. I wanted to have a chat.

'Wonderful place you've got here!' I began. 'It's exactly as I imagined it.'

The man didn't even look at me. 'Imagined what, may I ask?'

'Heaven of course! I'm very happy to be here. There's only one bad thing: all my best friends will be in hell.' And I laughed at this bad joke.

'This is not heaven, sir,' the man said, very polite but cold. 'This is only reception.'

I was shocked. 'But it must be heaven!'

'Because... because... well, you've heard the details of my life. I mean, I've always been a good man and if you're good, you'll go to heaven, but if you're...'

'Everybody says that, sir,' the man interrupted. 'I know you all think that on earth, but we have a different logic here -

for practical reasons. Think of the problems if good people always go to heaven and bad people always go to hell. There will be very few people in heaven and too many people in hell. There isn't enough room in hell. So we have a more practical system. Everybody must take his or her chance.'

'Chance? What do you mean?' I was beginning to feel a bit frightened.

At that moment the computer buzzed and a piece of paper came out.

'Here's your reception form, sir. And this is your green card. Go through the doors behind me and walk along the road. You will see two large gates.

In front of them are some slot machines. Insert your green card into the left-hand slot and you will see two dice in the display window. Pull the handle and when the dice stop, the machine will deliver a white card for any number from one to six and a black card for any number from seven to twelve.

The white card opens the gate on the right, the black card opens the left. The left goes to hell, the right to heaven.'

I couldn't believe my ears and I just stared at him. Then I became angry.

'But that's not fair!' I shouted.

'It's as fair as we can make it, sir.'

'But it's just chance! Luck! Accident! It's a lottery!' Yes, sir. But it's God's orders and we can't change it.'

'God's orders!' I shouted, furious. 'But it means that Jack the Ripper, for example, could be in heaven!'

'Jack the Ripper? I've heard the name before. Let me see.'

The receptionist opened a large file. 'Yes, Jack the Ripper. He arrived about a hundred earth years ago. I don't remember very well but I think he was quite pleased with our system.'

'I'm sure he was!' I said angrily. 'And I'm sure he went to heaven!' Then I looked quickly at the clerk. 'Well? Did he?'

'I can't tell you that, sir. You see, we don't know. Nobody knows. It's God's secret.'

'God's secret?' I cried, 'Oh God, no, no! I'm not going to spend eternity with Jack the Ripper. It's not fair!' And I stamped my foot on the floor like an angry child.

'You must take your chance like everybody else, sir,' the man said coldly.

'But don't you understand? All my life I tried to be a good man!'

The man looked embarrassed. 'I'm sorry but that is not relevant to the laws of the universe.'

'What laws? What do you mean?'

'If I remember well, there was a Mr Albert Einstein who arrived about forty years ago. He was a good man too, I believe and, like you, he was very upset by our system. He couldn't accept it. He said that he didn't believe that God plays dice. I told him that God certainly plays dice and that

it was the fundamental reality of the universe. Yes, Mr Einstein was very unhappy about that because he had helped to discover it - so he said.'

I didn't answer; I was too upset speak. I took the form and the green card and walked quickly to the doors behind the reception desk. They floated open.

There was a long road in front of me. In the distance I could see two enormous gates, one white, one black. They were made of beautiful heavy crystal glass that shone like jewellery.

I walked along the road. It was very silent. On each side of me were great clouds that trembled and changed in a soft wind. Even the light seemed to change from brightness to shadow and back again.

I came to the gates. When I looked at the black gate on the left, my heart stopped. What was behind it? Who was behind it? Then I looked at the gate on my right and trembled. Who or what was behind heaven's gate? I inserted my green card in one of the slot machines. There was a buzzing sound and the display window showed two dice. My hand went up to pull the handle.

'Not yet, not yet!' I said to myself. 'I want to think. I want to sit down and wait a bit. I want to take my time.' So I sat on the road and began to talk to myself. 'Oh, this is terrible!

I never smoked, I never drank, I never gambled, I never stole any money, I never hurt anybody... Of course I was careful about my health and I looked after my money like

everybody else. I wasn't stupid! But now...! I could be with thieves, murderers - politicians! - for the rest of eternity. It's really terrible!

And so I sat there and talked like a lunatic. Sometimes I looked at the handle of the slot machine which was waiting for me, and I trembled.

'Well, it's better to be in heaven even if Jack the Ripper is there. People say that heaven is a beautiful place. Oh, God, dear God, please let me get a white card!'

So I prayed for a white card and after a while I felt much better, more optimistic. I felt that God was on my side. I stood up, walked to the machine and pulled the handle down quickly. The dice began to spin. I closed my eyes; opened them. The first dice stopped at number two. My heart beat fast with hope. Then the second dice came. Five. Silence. Then like a photo from a polaroid camera the card came out. It was black. I fainted.

When I opened my eyes again, I sat still for a long time. Hot tears filled my eyes. I was going to hell!

'I knew it, I knew it!' I cried. 'I've always been unlucky!'

But what could I do? I had to enter the door on the left; I had to go to hell. I inserted my black card into a slot by the gate. As it began to open a strange, aromatic odour came out. I went into another great hall with a reception desk at the far end. It was a long walk. The walls were made of black smoke and red flames. Behind the desk sat a pretty young blonde woman. She gave me a sweet smile.

'Hallo. May I have your reception form, please?' she said in a friendly way.

I gave her the form and she typed the information into a computer.

'Why do you look so depressed?' she asked with her sweet smile. 'You're a lucky man.'

I laughed bitterly. 'Lucky?'

'Here's your room key,' she continued. 'We hope you'll like Room 206. You'll find everything in order - drinks, magazines, a change of clothes, a bottle of wine, and everything necessary for your comfort. There is a reading lounge, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a card table. We hope that you will enjoy your eternity.'

I was watching her to see if she was joking behind that sweet smile.

'This is hell, is it?' I asked in a sarcastic voice.

'That's the official name, yes. But we call it Paradise Regained. I suppose you thought it would be a terrible place, but things have changed a lot. We've made it better. You'll see.

'Oh, there are so many good, kind people here. I can't remember all their names. Let me think. Well, there's an Indian gentleman, Mr Gandhi, and a nurse called Florence Nightingale...'

'You mean those people are all here - in hell?'

'But it's not hell any more. It's the dice, you see.'

'The dice? No, I don't see. Please explain.'

'Well, for a long time a lot of good people scored more than six and got a black card, so now there are more good people than bad people. This doesn't happen often, of course; it's a very unusual thing and it will certainly change again. Then we'll get the usual average of about fifty good, fifty bad.'

Smiling, I said, 'Has God fixed the dice - for a joke or something?'

She looked a bit shocked. 'Oh no! I'm sure God is an honest gambler. It happened by accident.'

'Hm. Well, let's say it's another one of God's secrets - eh?' And I gave her a big wink. 'What about Jack the Ripper? Is he here?'

'Jack the Ripper...' She looked through her file. 'No, he isn't here. He must be on the other side - in heaven.'

I laughed and laughed. 'And are they having a bad time there?'

The receptionist said quietly, 'Between you and me, we've heard that they are having a lot of trouble in heaven.'

I laughed again and tears of happiness came into my eyes.

'Welcome to Paradise Regained,' said the woman with a big sweet smile. 'Have a nice eternity!'

'Thank you. This place looks better than earth...'

At that moment an intercom buzzed and the woman answered.

'Reception Three speaking. Can I help you?' As she listened her expression changed. It became dark and anxious. 'Oh, I see. Thank you, Reception One.' She was silent.

'Anything wrong?' I asked.

'Well, as you know, the situation on earth is very turbulent at the moment and a lot of new people have arrived. Reception One says a big crowd is already at the dice machine.'

'Who are they?' I had a bad feeling in my stomach.

'Reception One says it's a group of terrorists, child killers, Mafiosi, football hooligans, drug barons...'

'Stop - please stop!' I shouted.

'We can only hope that our luck continues,' she said. Her sweet smile had gone; she was looking at the entrance with frightened eyes.

I cried, 'Please God, let them all go to heaven! I pray, I pray...!'

'I'm sorry but praying won't help. It all depends on the dice.'

'And that's God's secret!' I said, laughing and crying at the same time.

While we waited, the silence was long and terrible.

Ask the teacher

Notes, doubts and favourite lines to take to your next class:

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