Sampler

Gaslight Grimoire

Dark Tales of Sherlock Holmes

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Foreword

Ghosts May Apply
David Stuart Davies

Arthur Conan Doyle was an accomplished practitioner of the supernatural tale and created some classic narratives in the genre. 'The Ring of Thoth', for example, was very influential within the realm of mummy stories. The idea of an ancient Egyptian achieving immortality and the setting of a museum after closing time became the essential ingredients of the 1932 movie, The Mummy, starring a very desiccated Boris Karloff. Other Doylean horror gems include 'The Brazilian Cat', 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', 'The Leather Funnel' and 'The Nightmare Room', to name a few – stories which are particularly chilling and memorable.

It must therefore have been a little frustrating for Doyle not to be able to involve his detective hero Sherlock Holmes in this mysterious and frightening world. What exciting scenes, puzzling scenarios and scary moments he could have created if he had allowed himself this guilty pleasure. But he had established Sherlock Holmes as a purely rational detective investigating real crimes with logical solutions. He knew that he would be weakening Holmes' appeal and powers if he involved him with ghosts and other creatures from beyond the grave where logicality had no foothold. As Holmes memorably observed in 'The Sussex Vampire', 'This Agency stands flat-footed upon the ground and there it must remain. This world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply.'

Nevertheless, Doyle did tease his readers with suggestions of supernatural interventions in two of Holmes' cases. In the aforementioned 'The Sussex Vampire' it was implied that a bloodsucking fiend was at work in the Ferguson household; and in The Hound of the Baskervilles, for some time the reader is unsure whether the phantom beast of the title really does exist. Even at the climax of the novel, when the hound finally makes its appearance – 'Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame' – we are still not absolutely certain that the thing is of flesh and blood and not a spectre from the pit. It is only when the creature howls with pain after Holmes has shot it several times that we are assured that the beast is mortal.

Despite these deceptive forays into the realms of the unknown Doyle actually stopped short of presenting the Great Detective with a real supernatural mystery. Other writers, perhaps seeing a niche gap in the market, took advantage of Doyle's reticence and around the turn of the nineteenth century there was a rack of ghost detectives materialising in print. 1898 saw the first appearance of Flaxman Low in Pearson's Magazine. Low was a sleuth cast clearly in the Holmes mould: clever, well read, possessing strong deductive powers with the ability to discern clues where others failed to do so. The marked difference between Low and his Baker Street counterpart was that he specialised in solving problems of a supernatural nature. Low was the joint creation of Kate Pritchard and her son Hesketh who published the tales under the pen name of E and H Heron. Hesketh was a friend and admirer of Conan Doyle and the Holmes influence on the stories is marked, especially in the two final cases where Low encounters the Moriarty-like figure of Kalmarkane. This collection brings Low and Holmes together as an intriguing double act in 'The Things That Shall Come Upon Them'.

Other spook sleuths followed in Low's wake. Most notably there was Algernon Blackwood's John Silence, who first appeared in 1908, and Carnacki the Ghost Finder penned by William Hope Hodgson. Carnacki, who made his debut in 1910, is of particular interest because not all his cases turned

out to be supernatural ones. On occasion human agencies were at the root of the various upheavals. Usually there is a chamber or a specific location that needs to be examined and carrying his trusty electric pentacle, Carnacki approaches the scene in very much the same way that Holmes does in many of his cases, with a close observation of the area searching for clues. You can observe how these two sleuths fare together in 'The Grantchester Grimoire', one of the tales in this volume.

As the twentieth century rolled on other psychic detectives followed in the footsteps of Low, Silence and Carnacki. There was Alice and Claude Askew's Amyler Vance, Dion Fortune's Dr. Taverner, A.M. Burrage's Francis Chard and Seabury Quinn's Jules de Grandin to name but a few. None really achieved the notoriety of Silence and Carnacki and certainly none approached the success of earth-bound Sherlock Holmes. Maybe the reason for their failure to catch the imagination of the mainstream reader is that these fellows not only believed in, but embraced the idea of the supernatural. They did not need convincing that there was a goblin in the cupboard, a vampire in the cellar or an ogre up the chimney. There was no surprise for them when they faced their demons… literally. The appeal then of these stories falls into two camps: the unusual nature of the haunting or supernatural event and the strange methods used by the psychic sleuth to alleviate the problem. These methods of course for the main part are invented by the author and have no roots in reality. This fanciful approach tends to rob the stories of suspense.

What is appealing about the prospect of Sherlock Holmes facing and battling the dark forces is that he is not a believer. The supernatural world is a fairy tale to him. No ghosts need apply because to his mind there are no such things.

When I wrote my first Holmes novel I took the brave or foolhardy step of pitting Holmes against Count Dracula, the king of all vampires. I don't do things by half measures. However, the novel began with Holmes holding exactly the same opinions as he did in 'The Sussex Vampire', decrying the idea that such fantastic nocturnal creatures exist:

'It should be clear, even to the most elementary of scientific brains, that the explanation of such beliefs lies not in the

supernatural, but in the acceptance of weird folk-tales as factual occurrences. For the simple mind, the line between reality and fantasy is blurred, but the educated brain should reject any such nonsense without hesitation.'

And, indeed, Holmes continues to reject any such nonsense until he encounters one of these blood-sucking fiends himself and then is schooled by Van Helsing in vampire lore. I believe that Holmes' gradual and reluctant acceptance of the supernatural world and his understanding that certain rationalities can still apply to it is one of the interesting aspects of this exercise in Sherlockian fiction. The fact that Holmes approaches any problem which may have supernatural connotations with scepticism and doubt adds extra interest and tension to the narrative, which is missing from those tales featuring ghost detectives. It is a subtle difference but it adds a richer and more engrossing element to the story.

Sherlock Holmes has always been a supremely gothic character with a strange costume, emerging himself like a ghost from the eerie fog and investigating bizarre crimes which take place in various ancient houses. The scenario of 'The Speckled Band' with bells ringing in the night, an unstable step father and a snake slithering down the bell rope are all elements that could have been plucked from one of Edgar Allan Poe's nightmare tales. Consider also the conclusion of 'The Creeping Man' (a good ghost story title if there ever was one) where we have a respectable academic turned into a libidinous monkey, swinging through the trees. Is this any less believable than one of Carnacki's poltergeists?

The point I am making is that in reality it is not too giant a step to take Holmes and Watson into the twilight world of the supernatural – Doyle brought them close to it on several occasions. As long as Holmes can still function as a detective, surprising Watson and others with his deductions, the introduction of a werewolf or an avenging spirit adds an extra frisson to the Baker Street scenario.

Doyle had to defend himself when critics observed that the stories in his final collection, The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes, lacked the freshness and ingenuity of the earlier tales. He explained that in repeating the basic formula of the

stories there was bound to be a sense of deja vu about them, a certain tiredness which was inevitable. If that was the case with Doyle, think how much more apposite it is to all the pastiches which have followed in the wake of the great man's work. In an attempt to replicate Doyle's style and approach, so many pastiches end up being pale imitations with that awful sense of repetition. 'Great heavens,' Watson will cry, 'How did you know I've just been to the tailors/been playing billiards/had a romantic liaison with Irene Adler/just shot your brother Mycroft.' Holmes will smirk and say, 'Elementary, Watson, you're wearing a new waistcoat/there is billiard chalk on the index finger of your left hand/there is lipstick on your earlobe, the hue of which is peculiar to Miss Adler/I saw a bullet with Mycroft's name it on your dressing room table this morning.' We've read that kind of stuff a hundred times before. The formula needs perking up. And maybe giving Holmes a taste of the supernatural is just the fillip needed. Of course it has been tried before. In recent years there's been a volume of the Lovecraftian extravaganzas, Shadows over Baker Street (2003), Caleb Carrs's ghostly stab at Holmes in The Italian Secretary (2005) and a collection called Ghosts in Baker Street (2006). However in general these stories were penned by writers who, for want of a better expression, were having a go at a Holmes tale unlike the authors featured in this volume who are very well-versed in the world of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson and so can effectively blend the world of Baker Street with the world of the unknown. I can guarantee you a good time here. Expect a few shivers along the way.

How will Holmes cope with things that go bump in the night? Well you'll have to read the stories to find out, but let me leave you with this thought. What better detective is there to delve into the unpredictable and frightening world of the supernatural than the one whose motto has always been: 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains however improbable must be the truth.'

Introduction

An Introductory Rumination on Stories for
Which the World Is Not Yet Prepared
Charles V. Prepolec

Never underestimate the impact of the fantastic on an impressionable child, be it in print, film or television. You never quite know where it may lead, or when it might bite you on the ass. In my case, it eventually led to the creation of Gaslight Grimoire: Fantastic Tales of Sherlock Holmes, so feel free to hold the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, Homer (the Greek chap, not Simpson), Alexander Korda, Stan "The Man" Lee, Lester Dent, Ray Harryhausen, Creature Feature presentations on Saturday afternoon television, Otto Penzler, Hammer Films and, of course, Arthur Conan Doyle accountable for the book you now hold in your hands. Although, to be perfectly fair, H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, R. L. Stevenson, Bram Stoker, and Greek myth in general should probably shoulder some of the blame too, but for now we'll stick to the shortlist. You see, as an only child, I spent a lot of time exploring fantasy worlds wherever I could find them – and quite frankly, I found them everywhere!

Hitchcock's Three Investigators (okay, Hitch himself is off the hook since he didn't write a one of them) were probably my first exposure to slightly scary mysteries. Well, at least some of the covers were sort of scary. One that had a glowing disembodied head on it that had to be safely put away before the lights went

out in my bedroom each night. My thanks to those fine folks at Scholastic Books (the same fine folks who, if memory serves, were inexplicably responsible for making me aware of Sawney Bean while I was still under 10 years of age) for messing with my young mind! Right about the same time, through a chunky paperback book found in my school library, Greek myth popped into my life with Jason and the Argonauts, which in turn led to a far too early reading of Homer's Odyssey. Jason, Hercules, and the clever Odysseus became early heroes. My sense of heroic fantasy, heroes and their heroic deeds, was forming, although a strange fear of cannibals was lurking in there somewhere too. Thank you again Scholastic. At about the same time I also had my first brush with Sherlock Holmes. I found myself reading The Hound of the Baskervilles, but at the time I didn't find it terribly engaging and didn't finish it. Anyhow, that Greek myth interest was further fuelled when Ray Harryhausen's Jason and the Argonauts turned up on television. Harryhausen's stop-motion animation gave magical life to creatures that had previously only existed in my imagination. In short order I was begging to be taken to see his Sinbad films (for the record, Kali has always been my favourite Harryhausen creation), which indirectly took me back to Alexander Korda's The Thief of Bagdad. Now that was the mother load for skewing this kid's idea of fantasy. It was the most magical thing I had ever seen, and it had the best villain ever in Conrad Veidt's Jaffar! He made Tom Baker's Prince Koura seem like a boy scout by comparison. What kid wouldn't want to be Sabu?

So with a major itch for heroic fantasy, I did what most geeky kids would do, start reading comic books and developing the first stages of 'collector's mania'. The Mighty Thor, Iron Man, Dr. Strange, Tomb of Dracula, the Uncanny X-men, and on and on went the list of Marvel comics. Stan Lee had a lot to answer for when he had the idea to infuse the tired superhero books of the 1950s with the soap opera antics of romance comics. Can you say addiction? I knew you could. It was all the perfect fodder to fuel my fascination with heroic fantasy figures. It also led me to discover the world of pulp heroes in a roundabout way. At the time, the mid-1970s, Marvel was producing a line of

black and white magazine sized comics and amongst them was Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze. Incidentally, there was also a two-part adaptation of The Hound of the Baskervilles in Marvel Preview, which was my second brush with Sherlock Holmes. The pictures helped, but I still wasn't terribly impressed. Through that Doc Savage magazine I discovered the near perfect heroic fantasy character. Doc Savage combined the best of everything I'd encountered up to that time. He was built like a hero from Greek myth, with bronzed skin and freaky gold eyes, blessed with a brilliant mind, surrounded by a band of lesser heroes, each with their own scientific specialty and had adventures that almost always had a huge fantasy element. Suddenly used bookstores entered my life as part of the quest to accumulate as many of the Doc Savage paperback reprints that I could get my hands on. It became an all-consuming passion. I must have been driving my poor parents nuts with my obsession, but they thought reading was good for me (can't imagine what they would have made of the Bond books or John Norman's Gor series I was also reading at the time) and so indulged me in my interests. I can vividly recall successfully convincing them to drive me some 300 kilometres north just so that I could scour the virgin territory of Edmonton's used bookshops. I eventually managed to accumulate about 102 of the paperback reprints, before moving on to another obsession, but not before reading Phil Farmer's curious Doc Savage bio Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life and being introduced to the inbred wonders of his Wold-Newton family tree. Suddenly there was a thread, however tenuous; tying together all these fantastic fictional heroes, and look, there on a low branch is that Sherlock Holmes guy again. I also discovered The Avenger, The Spider and, of course, The Shadow! Like Doc Savage, I first encountered The Shadow in comic books, although the fact they were published by DC bothered me no end! Still, Denny O'Neil's stories and more importantly Mike Kaluta's unsurpassed artwork did the trick. "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" became my catchphrase. Rarely got an answer to that one, but what did I know about 'evil' or 'the hearts of men'? I was a 12 year old kid and The Shadow was cool. So cool that when I spotted him in a book called The Private Lives of Spies, Crime Fighters,

and Other Good Guys by Otto Penzler, and discovered there were films with The Shadow, I simply had to have it! While The Shadow chapter was pretty thin, I was introduced to a whole new genre that captured my imagination, however fleetingly. The detective in print and film had entered my life…and there was that Sherlock Holmes guy again. I can recall being quite taken with a photo of John Barrymore as Holmes holding a gun on the grotesquely featured Gustav Von Seyffertitz as Moriarty, but little else.

Unfortunately my detective interest was immediately sidetracked by another book, Alan Frank's The Movie Treasury: Monsters and Vampires with a garish cover image of Christopher Lee being staked. Suddenly I wanted to see monster movies, and lots of them. Happily every Saturday afternoon there was a Creature Feature program on television to feed that particular craving. More importantly it had the added benefit of sending me back to the literature. I ended up reading Dracula, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Picture of Dorian Gray, The House on the Borderland, Carnacki the Ghost Finder, The War of the Worlds, The Invisible Man and who knows how many horror anthologies edited by the late Peter Haining. My interest in fantasy had shifted away from the bright and shiny, clean cut heroes of childhood and drifted down the dark gaslit alleys of the macabre. Comic books grew less important and gave way to somewhat more esoteric reading materials. Yup, you guessed it; puberty had begun to work its own peculiar magic! Sexual repression seemed to be the order of the day as my fantasy worlds began to take on a distinctly Victorian tinge. It seemed to me that the era was simply one big heavily populated playground for monsters, madmen and murderers, and thanks to Hammer Films on television, apparently they all looked an awful lot like either Christopher Lee or Peter Cushing.

While my reading interests went all over the map at that point, bloody 80's horror, trashy true crime thrillers, Herbert's Dune series, Tolkein's The Lord of the Rings, Anne McCaffrey's Pern, and God knows what else, the concept of an almost

homogenous Victorian nightmare world remained firmly lodged at the back of my mind. My teen years came to an end and on a fateful day in 1986 I found myself in a comic shop. Browsing the racks I was drawn to the brightly painted image of Sherlock Holmes standing in a graveyard. It was the cover of the first issue of Renegade Press' Cases of Sherlock Holmes. The text was Conan Doyle's The Beryl Coronet, but it was accompanied by the wonderfully atmospheric black and white artwork of Dan Day. Was that Peter Cushing's face staring out at me? Yes, it was, although in the next panel it was Basil Rathbone's, and in the one after that John Barrymore. Hmm, that Victorian playground concept was flashing back into my mind so I picked it up, went home and read it. Here was that Sherlock Holmes guy that I kept running across, but largely ignored, throughout my childhood. Sherlock Holmes, turned out to be calm, cool, insightful, larger than life fantastic hero and best of all, he lived in my Victorian fantasyland. By the next day I was in a used bookstore looking for a copy of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. I found myself reading the words "To Sherlock Holmes she was always the woman", and considering I was floundering after a bad break-up with my girlfriend, I was utterly and completely hooked. By the weekend I had Peter Haining's The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook and discovered there was a whole world of Sherlock Holmes related material out there, including something called a pastiche. Back to the used bookshops I went. Fred Saberhagen's The Holmes-Dracula File fell into my hands, Loren D. Estleman's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Holmes followed suit, then Manly Wade Wellman's Sherlock Holmes's War of the Worlds, and oh look, Phil Farmer's Wold-Newtonry was back in my life with The Adventure of the Peerless Peer. Apparently I wasn't the only one who thought the Victorian era was a literary fantasyland, but best of all, my new hero, a classic one that seemed to embody the best qualities of all my childhood interests, served as a guide through this nightmare world. To be sure, some of it was truly dire in terms of quality writing, but it was the most fun I'd had in a lifetime of reading, and fun is the key to entertainment.

Flash forward some 20-odd years and here I am, still

having fun in my Victorian fantasyland and exploring the ever-expanding world of Sherlock Holmes. From the distance an early 21st century vantage point provides, the idealized Victorian and Edwardian world Sherlock Holmes inhabits is to the modern reader, in its own way, as strongly realized and alien a fantasy setting as Tolkien's Middle Earth or Baum's Oz and just as much fun! Gaslight Grimoire: Fantastic Tales of Sherlock Holmes will, I hope, communicate some of that sense of fun that I've been enjoying all these years.

Throughout this rambling rumination I've made mention of a number of Conan Doyle's contemporaries and successors who worked the rich vein of fantasy fiction. In the stories ahead you will perhaps find echoes from some of their works or their characters. The connection may be very subtle or it may come through loud and clear as it does in Barbara Hambly's "The Lost Boy", a bittersweet tale of Sherlock Holmes and J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan. Considering Conan Doyle's one-time collaboration and longtime friendship with Barrie, it is a perfect starting point for our collection. Christopher Sequeira's "His Last Arrow" is a cautionary tale, possibly inspired by Sir Richard Francis Burton's translation of The Book Of The Thousand Nights And A Night, which drives home the adage that you should be careful what you wish for as Watson appears to have brought home more than a war from his time in Afghanistan. Barbara Roden's "The Things That Shall Come Upon Them" contains our first pairing of Holmes with a classic 'psychic detective', in this case Hesketh-Prichard's groundbreaking Flaxman Low. Holmes and Low both find themselves investigating, from decidedly different perspectives, strange occurrences in a house that is sure to be familiar to readers of M. R. James' "The Casting of the Runes". The Flaxman Low stories are a perfect example of Conan Doyle's direct influence on a contemporary, as the Low stories began appearing in Pearson's Magazine in 1898, less than a year after Hesketh-Prichard met Conan Doyle at a writer's dinner. Another, earlier, writer's dinner was also a meeting point for Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde, who's The Picture Of Dorian Gray, seems to have an echo in M.J. Elliott's "The Finishing Stroke", a grisly tale of art gone wrong. Martin Powell brings in Conan Doyle's

other great creation Professor George Edward Challenger in a Boy's Own/pulp styled two-fisted adventure tale that could only be called "Sherlock Holmes in the Lost World". In Rick Kennett and A. F. (Chico) Kidd's "The Grantchester Grimoire", Holmes meets his second 'psychic detective'. In this case it is arguably the best known, and certainly best loved, example of the breed, William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki the Ghost Finder. Kennett and Kidd have previously collaborated on a highly recommended collection of Carnacki pastiche available under the title No. 472 Cheyne Walk (Ash-Tree Press 2002). In "The Strange Affair of the Steamship Friesland", a direct follow-up to "The Five Orange Pips", journalist Peter Calamai presents Holmes with a unique method of correcting an early failure after consulting a certain familiar doctor with an address in South Norwood. Lewis Carroll's Alice may have disappeared into another world, but any comparison with J. R. Campbell's "The Entwined" stops right there, as the girl in this story dreams of nothing that could be described as a Wonderland. An aging Watson finds himself faced with the horrific power of strong remembrances when Chris Roberson delves into the untold tale of "Merridew of Abominable Memory". When a private investigator on the mean streets of 1940s Los Angeles finds himself faced with a corpse that won't stay down he turns to the greatest detective still living for help, bringing together influences as widely removed as Bram Stoker and Dashiell Hammett in Bob Madison's humorous and hardboiled story "Red Sunset". Our final entry takes a decidedly different turn in that Sherlock Holmes is nowhere to be found; instead Kim Newman has Professor Moriarty, along with Colonel Moran, waging a highly personal and often hilarious War Of The Worlds in "The Red Planet League".

At the beginning of this long-winded and wandering introduction I wondered what the impact of fantastic fiction on an impressionable child, might be? Well, now you know, in my case it eventually led to the creation of the book you hold in your hands. A little horror, a little pulp-style thriller, a little comic book adventure, a little ghostly spook story, a little bit mystery and hopefully a whole lot of fun. Not your traditional selection

of Sherlock Holmes stories by any means, but what is the fun of that? After all, as Watson noted in The Speckled Band "…he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual and even the fantastic…" so why should we?

Enjoy!

Charles Prepolec
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