The Case of the Russian Chessboard

Reviewed by SOB Charlie Cook

I’ve been really busy with math projects and haven’t done much with Sherlock Holmes lately. So I grabbed a short novella (10 pages) from my bookshelf and am providing my thoughts. I agree with PFL David’s comment a few months ago about too many pastiches and not of the best quality. This wasn’t the best I’ve read but it had some merit, so I’m sending it for others to consider.

“The Case of the Russian Chessboard: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery only now revealed”, by Charlie Roxburgh (Published in the UK by MX Publishing, $9.95 USD)

None of the usual repartee between Holmes and Watson to begin this tale; just the instant arrival of a distraught young lass (obviously Russian) whom Watson pegs as a librarian. Victoria Simmonds informs Holmes that her friend Sophia has thrown herself in front of a locomotive and that the client’s sister, Angela, has moved into the dead woman’s hostel. She begs the detective to help save her sister.

It turns out that the “hostel” is a den of Russian dissidents planning various atrocities to take place in London and Angela, after involving herself in the murder of a spy, is forced to participate. What can Holmes do?

To complicate matters, Mycroft has indirectly arranged for Holmes to assist some Russian diplomats, whom Holmes suspects of being terrorist leaders themselves. They want him to reveal his client and any information he has... Continued on Page 3
From the “Battered Tin Dispatch-Box” or His Own Experience?

The September 20, 2015 Regular Monthly Meeting of The Sound of the Baskervilles will begin at 1:30 p.m. at The Seattle Public Library at 400 West Garfield, Seattle (Queen Anne Branch). Says PFL David:

This—our 50th tale in the Canon in publication date order—is not a locked room mystery, but it’s about as difficult as any other to solve! And, it introduces us to the depths of Watson’s battered tin dispatch-box, which is stored “somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Coz and Co., at Charing Cross,…”. But this tale, says Watson, is from his own experience with Holmes.

His wife is dead, the accused is in custody, the evidence is clear, the coroner’s jury has reached a decision, and yet J. Neil Gibson presents himself to Holmes seeking help. As Holmes so succinctly tells Watson, “I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them. Unless some entirely new and unexpected ones come to light I do not see what my client can hope for.” So what’s the problem? Clearly, Gibson can afford Holmes’ fee and Holmes has, after all, been mighty bored. Study up on “The Problem of Thor Bridge” to learn the trick!

At this Meeting, SOB Lauran Stevens will also present a true or false quiz, titled “What’s in a Name”, with delightful prizes! PFL David will bring writing instruments; Lauran will provide the paper!

The Big Book of Sherlock Holmes Stories


On October 27, Vintage Crime/Black Lizard will publish The Big Book of Sherlock Holmes Stories—the BIGGEST collection of Sherlock Holmes stories EVER assembled. Edgar Award-winning editor Otto Penzler returns with his latest Big Book anthology, featuring 83 Sherlockian tales sure to charm all who enjoy the remarkable detective who dominates countless books, films, and TV shows.

Never has there been a better time for an anthology of Sherlock Holmes-inspired stories. The past several years we have seen a great renaissance in the character’s popularity, as Benedict Cumberbatch’s already iconic portrayal in the BBC’s Sherlock continues to enthral fans, as Jonny Lee Miller and Lucy Liu take Holmes and Watson into new territory in CBS’s Elementary, and finally, as Robert Downey, Jr.’s Sherlock Holmes franchise attests.

The Big Book of Sherlock Holmes Stories
The Most Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes Stories Ever Assembled
Edited and with an Introduction by Otto Penzler
A Vintage Crime/Black Lizard Original
On Sale: October 27, 2015

**A simultaneous deluxe hardcover will be released by Pantheon**

About Otto Penzler:
Otto Penzler is the proprietor of The Mysterious Bookshop in New York City. He was publisher of The Armchair Detective, the founder of the Mysterious Press and the Armchair Detective Library, and created the publishing firm Otto Penzler Books. He has twice received the Edgar Award as well as the Ellery Queen Award from the Mystery Writers of America for his many contributions to the field. He most recently edited the anthology The Big Book of Christmas Mysteries and New York Times bestseller The Black Lizard Big Book of Pulps. In addition, he is editor of several other Black Lizard titles, including The Vampire Archives, Zombies! Zombies! Zombies!, and The Black Lizard Big Book of Black Mask Stories.

The Book Includes: Over a century’s worth of cases, from Conan Doyle’s 1890s parodies of his own creation to Neil Gaiman’s “The Case of Death and Honey”—first published in 2011! Appearances by those other great detectives Hercule Poirot and C. Auguste Dupin. 15 Edgar Award–winning authors and 5 Mystery Writers of America Grand Masters! Stories by Laurie R. King, Colin Dexter, Anthony Burgess, Anne Perry, Stephen King, P.G. Wodehouse, Kingsley Amis, and many, many more.
A Baker’s Dozen of Damsels in Distress: Name the Tale!

Quiz #6 by SOB Charlie Cook

1. Lady Eva Brackwell
2. Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope
3. Lady Mary Brackenstall
4. Mary Maberley
5. Mary Morstan
6. Mary Sutherland
7. Mrs. St Clair
8. Mrs. Warren
9. Violet Hunter
10. Violet Smith
11. Susan Cushing
12. Grace Dunbar
13. Julia Stoner

Name the tale in which each Damsel appears in the Canon. Try using the commonly-accepted abbreviation for the story titles. The conventional abbreviations were devised by Jay Finley Christ and use four letters; writers differ, however, as to their use of four capital letters [e.g., ABBE] vs. only one capital letter [e.g., Abbe]. Answers are on Page 5.


The Case of the Russian Chessboard

Continued from Page 1

...learned about the “hostel”. They offer to recruit him to play an important part in their “chess game” with the Russian exiles. Even offering him money and a chance to visit the crime laboratories in St. Petersburg!

I’m a reader, not a critic, so I’m always looking for Sherlockian tales I’ve found to recommend to my fellow lovers of pastiches. If you enjoy stories about Russian nihilists and terrorists in London, hop right in. Once the story gets going, it moves along well enough. There are several historical references to the problems these exiles faced in Mother Russia as well as in London, and I trust that the author’s research is accurate. But this wasn’t my favorite чай (glass of chai)!

Too much using Holmes to describe the activities of the Russian secret police and not enough of Holmes and Watson and the Doyle atmosphere to satisfy my palate. But it may whet your appetite.

Babies Make Predictions, Too

Excerpted from The Wall Street Journal

Says Alison Gopnik in the August 12, 2015 issue, “In ‘The Adventure of Silver Blaze’, about a valuable racehorse that mysteriously disappears, Sherlock Holmes tells the hapless Detective Gregory to note the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime. But, says Gregory, the dog did nothing in the night-time. That was the curious incident, Holmes replies—the dog didn’t bark on the night of the crime, as you would expect. A new study suggests that as babies start to figure out the world, they think a lot like Sherlock...People often say that babies are “sponges.” The metaphor reflects a common picture of how the brain works: Information floods into our eyes and ears and soaks into our brains, gradually becoming more abstract and complex...But a very different picture, called “predictive coding,” has been making a big splash in neuroscience lately. This picture says most of the action in the brain comes from the top down. The brain is a prediction machine. It maintains abstract models of the world, and those abstract models generate predictions about what we will see and hear. The brain keeps track of how well those predictions fit with the actual information coming into our eyes and ears, and it notes discrepancies...In fact, studies show that your brain responds to the things that don’t happen, as well as those that do. If we expect to see something and it doesn’t appear, the visual part of our brain responds. That makes sense for adults, with all our massive accumulated learning and experience. But how about those baby sponges?...Even 6-month-olds, who can’t crawl or babble yet, can make predictions and register whether the predictions come true, as the predictive picture would suggest. It turns out that baby brains are always on the lookout for the curious incident of the dog who did nothing. Each one is a little Sherlock Holmes in the making. For more, go to: http://on.wsj.com/1NamFDU
Things to See, Buy, Do and Know

- Seen in Seattle’s City Arts magazine (August 2015): An ad for the “Stage to Screen presents National Theater Live” presentation on October 15 at SIFF Cinema Uptown of “Hamlet, starring Benedict Cumberbatch”!! For more, go to: siff.net. **THANKS TO SOB LAURAN STEVENS!**
- Nice article for you to read; “Cumbermania reaches fever pitch with ‘Hamlet’” is at: http://ireader.olivesoftware.com/Olive/iReader/SeattleTimes/SharedArticle.aspx?document=STCD%5c2015%5c08%5c24&article=Ar01305. **THANKS TO SOB BILL SEIL!**
- BBC Sherlock at San Diego’s Comic Con: Though Benedict, Martin and Andrew (Moriarty) were not present, there was still a “Sherlock” panel at the San Diego Comic Con. Fortunately, Kate Nelson and her husband Andrew were. On the panel were Steven Moffat, Sue Vertue, and Rupert Graves (Lestrade). She forwarded the URL where you can see their discussion: https://youtu.be/TtWPTMZRgzY. **THANKS, KATE!**
- Seen in the Vancouver (BC) Sun, 8/27/2015: An ad for the “9th Annual Summer Sizzler at Cambie Village” featuring the 5-man musical group, The Hounds of Buskerville!
- Coming out October 15, 2015 is Sherlock Holmes’s London: Explore the City in the Footsteps of the Great Detective by Rose Shepherd (HC, $18.58 at Amazon). “Sherlock Holmes is one of the world’s most famous detectives, but Sherlock would be nothing without 221B Baker Street, the West End and the crime-ridden streets of London. Indeed, you cannot talk about Sherlock Holmes and not immediately think about the wonderfully mysterious and foggy city that was London at the end of the nineteenth century...”. **THANKS TO SOB BILL SEIL!**
- Sherlock’s Keychain? See it and buy it at http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/ijgk/ “Sherlock Holmes likes to keep his things just so. His shirts are just so. His sheet music is just so. His chemicals are just so. And his keys...where are his keys? Have you seen his keys? His brilliant mind can’t keep track of everything, so that’s why Dr. Watson had these Sherlock Keychains made. Holmes can’t forget his house key if it’s on a keychain that looks like his front door, right?” **THANKS TO SOB ANN DEUSENBERRY!**
- We last reported on this item in the April 2015 issue of Ineffable Twaddle (Vol 34, Issue 4, P.4)—“a 99.9% fine silver 1-ounce Sherlock Holmes coin” that was issued by the country Tuvalu in 2014. Go to: governmentmint.com and search for item 258913—and here is a scan of the image of this coin. While the promo material has some errors, it does look like a fine coin. **THANKS TO SOB TERRY BURNS!**
- It’s not Holmesian, but “Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries” is a spiffing series that all lovers of period TV drama series ought to be on the lookout for. Seattle’s PBS station, KCTS 9, has just broadcast season one. (One hopes season two will shortly follow.) Meanwhile the following episode sounds like an excellent introduction to this charming jazz age series: **Miss Fisher Uncovered**. “Glamorous ‘lady detective’ Phryne Fisher (Essie Davis) is a thoroughly modern woman in late 1920s Melbourne, who goes about her work with a pistol close at hand—and, more often than not, a male admirer even closer. This program takes a behind-the-scenes look at the gorgeously costumed and evocatively shot Australian series. Watch it 9/17/2015 or 9/24/2015.” **THANKS TO SOB DC SMITH!**
- Seattle lost a great fellow with the death of Bill Farley—founder (1990), owner (until 1999) and part-time employee (into the 2000s) of the Seattle Mystery Bookshop—at age 84 in late June, just 3 days short of the Bookshop’s 25th anniversary. He’ll be greatly missed, but the Bookshop still goes on—thank goodness! **THANKS TO SOBs ANN MILAM AND BILL SEIL!**
- Do you like the BBC’s “Sherlock”? Do you like dolls with oversized heads? If you answered ‘yes’ and ‘yes’, you’ll be pleased to know that Funko has produced a range of items just for you. There are six dolls available: Sherlock (with and without a violin), John, Mycroft, Jim Moriarty and Irene. Go to “shop” then “Sherlock” to see them. They are approximately 3½” high and are now on “pre-order” at $10.98 each, plus postage. **THANKS TO SOB MAFFIE RAFFERTY!**

Congrats to Long-Term (1990) SOBs Manson & Nancy Polley who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in April!!
Gillette Film Find Reveals Other Tidbits

The Chicago Tribune’s May 24 “A + E” section carried a feature item titled “Lost Sherlock movie mystery solved”. What’s different about this report of the famous find is the detail provided about the site where the 1916 Gillette silent film was found and other discoveries made, which did not gain such notoriety as the Holmes movie! For example, did you know the film was shot in Chicago? Or that Fort de Saint-Cyr was built in response to the 1870 Prussian invasion of France? That the archivist also found that day in February 2014 an episode of a 1954 TV series ("The Case of the Texas Cow Girl") in one of those cans? Or that a work print of a masterpiece can turn up in a janitor’s closet in a Norwegian mental institution: It happened in 1981 with Carl Dreyer’s "Passion of Joan of Arc." Reporter Michael Phillips went to France to get the whole story, which you can read here—http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-sherlock-holmes-william-gillette-essonay-cinema-theque-20150521-column.html

Thanks on Dues is Due; 2016 Dues Return to Normal Level

Even though we had a “dues holiday” for renewing Members’ 2015-2016 Club dues this past March, many thanks go to all who added a little extra for our general fund—just because!

And a word about our 2016-2017 dues: The bit of a “dues holiday” will end in March, 2016, when dues will once again be the same for both new and renewing Members. That’s $20 for individuals, $30 for families (U.S. funds only). We hope you see value in your dues! It includes this monthly newsletter, a copy of Beaten’s Christmas Annual, and the incalculable benefits of association with a group of certifiable Holmes aficionados!

Joint Meeting with The Stormy Petrels of BC!!

Thanks to efforts by SOB Board Member Emeritus Al Nelson and Stormy Petrel Sheldon Goldfarb, a joint meeting of our two Sherlockian Clubs is in the works. And, we do have the date, time and location: Saturday, November 21, 2015, Noon to 4 p.m. at the Skagit River Brewery (404 S. 3rd St, [360] 336-2884) in Mt Vernon, WA. (http://www.skagitbrew.com)

Separate checks will be provided and drinks will be “no host” (at your expense). If needed, email Al at nelsonah46@yahoo.com.

Stay tuned for further details and carpooling ideas!!

Update on the John H. Watson Society Competitions

It was last March when we last provided an update on The SOBs quiz team’s results in the JHWS weekly quiz competitions. Our team consists of resident experts SOBs Margie Deck and Sheila Holtgrieve! Here are results from April through July:

1. CHAS 8 RED
2. SECO 9 CPDP
3. AVBE 10 SOLI
4. JFHL 11 CIRD
5. SIGN 12 THOR
6. IDEN 13 SPEC
7. TWIS
10. PFL David

With “The 3rd Annual John H Watson Canonical Treasure Hunt: The Ultimate Sherlockian Quiz” out since July 31, The SOBs team of SOBs Sheila Holtgrieve and Lauren Messenger (with a little help from their friend, the PFL) have now submitted their hard-fought-for entry!

But where, you ask, were Margie Deck and Airy Maher in this year’s Treasure Hunt? You got it: The creator of the 3rd Annual Treasure Hunt was our own dastardly Pawky Puzzler herself, Margie—so she couldn’t compete! And, with the death this past spring of Don Libey (“Buttons”), editor of JHWS’s periodical “The Watsonian”, that position has now been ably assumed by Airy (now “Carla Buttons”)! Talented women all!!

SOBs on “Mr Holmes” Film
At our August 16 Meeting, SOB Airy Maher said she really liked it and recommended it. SOB Al Nelson said to see it once but that it’s not so memorable that you need to make an extra effort to see it. SOBs Sheila Holtgrieve and Airy Maher agreed the film stayed true to the book. PFL David said some points made by Holmes of his former relationship with Watson were unthinkable! Peter Blau points us to YouTube’s 38-minute “behind-the-scenes” making-of footage and says, “It’s a fine look at what’s involved in creating a movie. And don’t neglect the links to interviews and trailers.”

writes SOB Ann Deusenberry, “A friend and I went to see it a few weeks ago. It was extremely well written and acted—not a classic Sherlock-style story at all but excellent nonetheless. If you are the kind of person who cries at movies, as I am, bring your tissues! The scenery was beautiful, too.”

**Small Spoiler Alert**

When Holmes goes to the movies to see a film about himself, the actor playing him is Nicholas Rowe, who played Sherlock in Steven Spielberg’s 1980s film "Young Sherlock Holmes".

A Baker’s Dozen of Damsels in Distress: Name the Tale!
Answers to Quiz #6

1. CHAS 8 RED
2. SECO 9 CPDP
3. AVBE 10 SOLI
4. JFHL 11 CIRD
5. SIGN 12 THOR
6. IDEN 13 SPEC
7. TWIS
10. PFL David
13. ABBE 3 SECO
15. SPEC 13 IDEN
16. WEEK 9 CPDP
18. AIRBE 10 SOLI
20. REDC 8 CHAS
The Sound of the Baskervilles
By appointment of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria

Ineffable Twaddle
The monthly publication of The Sound of the Baskervilles
A Scion Society of the Baker Street Irregulars since March 31, 1980
Serving the Greater Puget Sound Region of Western Washington, USA

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Member News, Notes, Updates

SOBs attending our August 16, 2015 Meeting, presided over by PFL David Haugen were:
- Pat McIntosh
- Airy Maher
- Terri Haugen
- Sheila Holtgrieve
- Al Nelson
- Lauran Stevens
- Kashena Konecki
- Marcia Marcy
- Margie Deck
- Lauren Messenger
- Paula Price
- Hank Deck
- Margaret Nelson

- Melinda Michaelson, Marcia’s sister, attended her first meeting and promptly joined! ★ We had a three-way tie for 1st place in our quiz on MAZA: Lauren M, Margie and newest SOB Melinda. It was pretty funny with the PFL playing charades in order to elicit answers in this challenge!
- SOB Webmaster Stu Nelan tells us he & Pat drove to DC in July to see daughter Kame-la, then on to New Hampshire to see daughter Jenica and her 3-year-old twin girls!! Also, Stu says that SOB Bill Mason is the newly-elected Head Light of The Beacon Society—a scion society of The BSIs, which provides “teachers with local resources to bring the magic of Sherlock Holmes to life in the classroom”. Kudos, Bill!
- SOB Charlie Cook reports that granddaughter/SOB Nadia Cook-Loshilov has a small role, as the younger sister, in the new Ethan Hawke film, “10,000 Saints”. Using the stage name Nadia Alexander, our budding star has been acting since age one! For more about the film and Nadia’s career, go to: http://www.imdb.com/name/nm3180297/?ref_=ttfc.fc.cl.i6. And, as to Charlie himself...as Prof Emeritus, University of South Carolina Sumter, he’s now the co-author of a paper entitled, “An Extension of Some Results Due to Jarden”—a very complicated 8-page analysis with hundreds of math equations! Aren’t they amazing?!
- SOB Ann Milam says she was in Ashland, OR for the Shakespeare Festival, where she encountered record-breaking heat of 105° in June! ★ Thanks to SOB Paul Naher (of KC, MO) who kept us apprised of SOB Don Mathews’ (of Elk City, ID) health condition over the past few months; Don appears to be on an even keel now!
- SOB Geoff Jefferies was enjoying retirement until he broke his left wrist again in July!! Spouse/SOB Cara Cross says his “honey do” list has started to fill up again!!
- A note from SOB Stu Smith, retired teacher in Poulsbo, WA, says “…the older I get, the less I want to go into the city. Just think of me as your member in the West Country!” We’ll do it, Stu!!
- SOB DC Smith says he’s been under the weather of late, so has missed meetings. Sounds, though, like he might be entering the Jim French Productions’ artwork contest (see sidebar on Page 4). We also suspect that SOB Dawn Kravagna will be entering, so let’s all wish them luck!!

The Sound of the Baskervilles...
...is a scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars, serving the greater Puget Sound Region of Western Washington, U.S.A., and has met monthly since March 31, 1980. $20 per year brings Members the monthly newsletter “Ineffable Twaddle”, a copy of Beaten’s Christmas Annual, and the incalculable benefits of association with a group of certifiable Holmes aficionados.

Meetings are held the 3rd Sunday of each month. Location of the meetings may vary. Regularly scheduled additional events throughout the year include: “The Masters’ Dinner” celebrating the meeting of Holmes and Watson (March), “The Annual Wreath Throw” commemorating Holmes’ loss at Reichenbach Falls (May), “The Dr. John H. Watson Picnic” (July), and “The Will Crakes Memorial Jollification” (December). Other activities—book crawls, teas, plays and gaming events—are announced.

To join or to renew your membership, send your check for dues—$20 for individuals, $30 for families (U.S. funds only)—to the address shown at left.