The Bilge Pump

Vol. 13, No. 07 July, 2025

The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star

founded November, 1970

PLEASE NOTE: August 03, 2025 Meeting NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on **August 03** at 1:00 pm central. I will send out the link for the meeting the week before the meeting. The story for the month is **"The Sign of Four – Part 1 (Chapters 1-6)"**.

Rich Krisciunas will once again present on Canonical Law 101.

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story of **"The Sign of Four – Part 1"**.

Our special guest speaker will be our own **Ann Caddell.**

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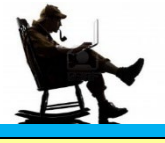

For more information concerning our society, visit: http://www.dfw-sherlock.org/

You can follow us on Twitter at: @barquelonestar

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Who dunnit: 	**Third Mate** **Helmsman** **Spiritual Advisors** **Secretary** **Historian** **Webmaster**	**Steve Mason, BSI** **Walter Pieper** **Don Hobbs, BSI** **Dr. Jim Webb, BSI** **Cindy Brown, BSI** **Pam Mason** **Rusty Mason**	**mason.steve8080@gmail.com** **waltpieper@att.net** **221b@verizon.net** **jimrwebb@ix.netcom.com** **myrkrid08@yahoo.com**

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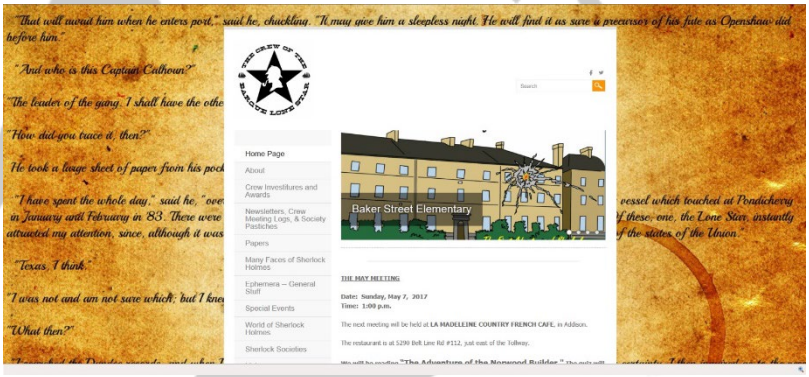


Our Facebook Page:

https://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar/

JULY 06 SUMMARY

There were 70 in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

The meeting was opened with a toast by Liane Luini written by Paul Churchill entitled "John H. Watson" (see page 5).

We followed that with a quiz on today's story, *A Study in Scarlet*.

Bob Katz led us in a rowdy discussion on the story line and emphasized that this was the first of 60 Sherlock Holmes story which began the canon. He noted that all 4 novels all have the same structure. (Hound, Study, Valley, and Sign.)

Robert Stek brought up the discussion of whether or not there was a limit to the number of words in Victorian magazines such as *The Strand*. Which is a distinctive difference between the short stories and novels in the canon. Doyle laid a foundation in *A Study in Scarlet*, which would work very well for the rest of the canon, without really knowing it.

Under announcements we had the following: The 10th book to be published by the Crew of the Barque Lone Star will be called *Rejected Holmes*. The deadline for submissions will be Oct. 1, 2025.

Liese Sherwood Fabre announced that the 2025 Bouchercon will be in New Orleans. She noted that the Sherlock Holmes panel will include some outstanding guests this year.

Steve Doyle mentioned that on September 12, Nicolas Meyer will once again be at Black Dog Books in Zionsville, IN. He will then attend an Illustrious Clients Meeting.

Madelaine Quiniones noted that the membership to the John H. Watson Society is now free. And August 1, will be the deadline for the Fall newsletter.

Bruce Beaman explained that Arthur Conan Doyle's Ghost Stories will be presented on PBS Passport. This will include one of the most famous Doyle ghost stories, Lot 249.

Denny Dobry's open house will be held on July 26, in Reading, PA.

There is a new PBS mystery series called Bookish, by Mark Gaittis of Sherlock fame.

Sandy Kozinn entertained us with a limerick on this month's story, A Study in Scarlet.

Rich Kruicuinas instructed us about law in Sherlockian Law 101.

Our featured speaker for this month was Derrick Belanger one of the publishers of Belanger Books. His topic was "Crop Beats Stick, Why the Crop is Sherlock Holmes Favorite Weapon."

Brad Keefauver then did his Top 10, which was stories that could have been inspired by A Study in Scarlet.

Shana Carter did a reading from the Baker Street Journal, Vol. 5, Number 5, entitled A Friend in Deed (see page 6).

Rich Krisciunas then closed the meeting with his toast to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

A TOAST TO JOHN H. WATSON

Liane Luini

from Watson's Tin Box, Irene's Cabinet, Volume 4, 2006
– Paul G. Churchill, BSI, "Corot"

He'd come right out of Netley in those early years
And joined the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers...
Big John…

Then he went overseas, this man of whom we're so fond,
But he fell at the battle that was called Maiwand...
Big John…

He was a medical man with a traveling wound,
And when he came by, all the women swooned...
Big John…

He got a roommate named Holmes who himself was cute,
A consulting detective of some repute…
Big John…

Neither Holmes nor Watson ever used first names,
So what was Mary thinking when she called him "James"?
Big John…

Now this doctor had a way with the written word,
So he wrote down all the cases of which he'd heard
Big John…

And he sold all his tales to the Strand Magazine,
A new publication that had made the scene...
Big John…

No Boobus britannicus was this man of steel;
He was a man of grit, he was a man of zeal…
Big John…

Now he seldom gets the credit for all his toil;
It goes to his agent, a guy named Doyle…
Big John…

But to us Tin Boxers who follow crime
He was the greatest gospel writer of any time…
Big John…Big John…Big bad John.

Why'd the cabbie kill men from Utah?
It goes back to the gal with no ma.
They treated her bad.
It was all very sad.
Holmes unraveled; cabbie's heart broke. Too bad!

Sandy Kozinn

A FRIEND INDEED

Shana Carter, ASH

Baker Street Journal (Edgar W. Smith, Editor)
Volume 4, Number 5, 1955

It is Holmesworthy to speculate what our choice might be if some guardian angel, with his wings spread over Baker Street, were to make us the gift of a firm and intimate friendship with one - just one - of the personages in the Saga.

We are led to suspect, somehow, that not many of us would elect for the Master himself. He is too much a being apart, and, paradoxically, too much at one with us, to make a physical propinquity altogether plausible; and, to be perfectly practical about it, we are none of us Watsons, after all: the sense of inferiority that would overwhelm us, compounded by the sardonic gibes that would often be our lot, would be more than most of us could comfortably put up with.

Nor would we, of course, go to the other extreme of asking for an affinity with Professor Moriarty - he would, we must think, either burden us unduly with mathematical gibberish and excursions into the rarefied areas where energy equals mass in grams times the square of the speed of light in centimeters per second, or he would induct us into some of his more mundane machinations to the point that we might find ourselves inextricably entangled in the exiguous threads of the criminal webs he was weaving.

Mrs. Hudson ·would, perhaps, attract us: it must be warm and cozy in that ground-floor flat at 221B Baker Street (or was the ground floor numbered simply 221, with only the floor above distinguished by the supplementary designation?), and there would be good gossip end conciergic anecdote pertaining to the strange lodgers she harbored; but after a while this association, one thinks, would wear thin.

Lestrade does not commend himself, nor do any of the other personae who wander on and off the stage. including even brother Mycroft… No, it seems there could be only one inevitable and ineluctable candidate for the companionship to which we might aspire - and that one, it is hardly

necessary to insist, would be John H. Watson himself.

What joys would lie before us if we could settle down on a long winter's evening, with the wind crying and sobbing like a child in the chimney, and the seacoals blazing in the hearth, with that stout right hand of Sherlock Holmes sitting in the chair across! There would be no forced prattle - for we, like Watson, would have learned to cultivate that "grand gift of silence."

But after a while , we like to think, he would put down the fine sea story of Clark Russell's he was reading, and - a distant look coming into his eyes - he would murmur:

"I ought to tell you, some time, about the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the Island of Uffa… I never had a chance to write it down, but it was one of Holmes's best cases, and it had some most peculiar features about it. You see, the Grice Patersons were not a family, they were a group of speleologists; and the island wasn't an island in the sense of a body of land surrounded by water - if it had been, I'd have said on the Island of Uffa… No, Uffa was a sort of enclave where the old Britons held out in caves for a great many years after the Romans came, and…"

And then the story would be told. Let any who will have their other personages, high or low, whose intimate presence, day after day, would be too much or too little for us to bear. We, for all he is and for all he could give us, will take Watson…

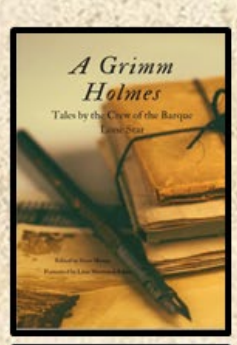
To subscribe to the Baker Street Journal, go to https://bakerstreetirregulars.com/the-baker-street-journal/

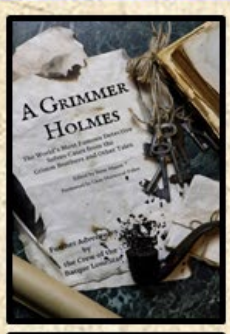
The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society has published 9 wonderful books. Each book is chocked full of wonderful essays and pastiches by our own Society members. You may download a free copy of the books (as .pdf files) on our website…

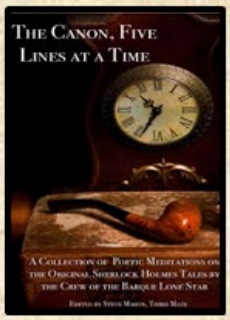
https://www.dfw-sherlock.org/society--crew-member-anthologies-pastiches.html

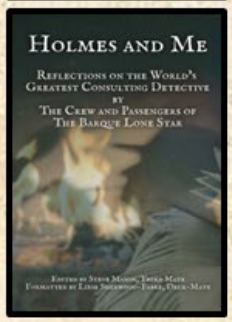
Or you may purchase a soft-back version of any of our books (at cost) at…

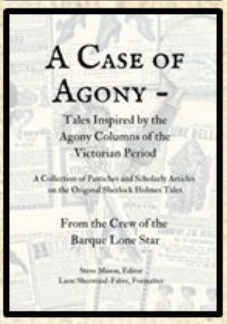
https://www.barnesandnoble.com/s/the%20crew%20of%20the%20barque%20lone%20star

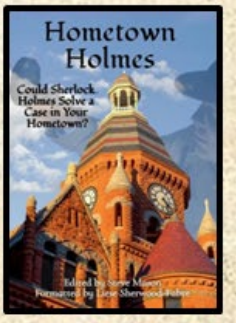


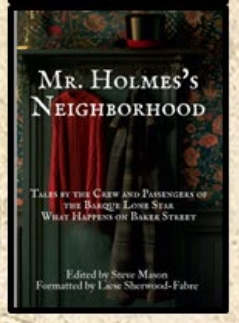












The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society is producing our 10th book in our 55th year of existence.

Dr. Watson published 60 stories chronicling his adventures with Sherlock Holmes, most of them in the Strand Magazine. Any he mentioned many, many, unchronicled cases. But have you ever wondered, did the Strand ever reject any of the stories?

Rejected Sherlock will finally reveal those stories the Strand would not publish, for whatever reason.

1. Stories should be 3,000 – 5,000 words, which is the average length for a short story. Obviously, a shorter story is fine.
2. Your story will be edited by one or two member volunteer editors, but only for grammar, typos… we will not edit the content of your story.
3. This project is not limited to just those members in the DFW area. Any member, or true Sherlockian, is welcome to submit a pastiche.
4. We plan to finalize the anthology by the end of the calendar year, so we ask for members to submit their entry by October 1.
5. Remember this is a family book, with minors participating, when picking up a topic.
6. We ask that you not only provide the story, but the actual rejection letter from the Strand editor.

The final product will be put together in book form and posted on our website and shared with all society members as a .pdf file. We plan on publishing copies of the book as a gift for those who submit a pastiche in the anthology. The book will then be sold on Barnes & Noble, along with our other books at cost.

Baker Street Elementary

We are celebrating the 10th year of Baker Street Elementary … we are honored so many people enjoy it each week. We have issued over 550 weekly strips as well as 10 full-length comic books. We are inviting all of our Sherlockian fans to participate directly in the 10-year anniversary. We would love for you to submit a comic strip to include in a book of BSE. Here's how it would work:

- Send us the text for a strip (you do not have draw anything… we will do that…)
- Have the 3 kids either at their classroom desk or the playground wall
- Please, no more than 4 panels (preferably 1-3 panels) for the strip
- Many great cartoonists have admitted they borrow ideas from previous cartoonists, so if you have a favorite strip from your past, think how our 3 kids would handle the same situation
- The deadline is October 1, so we can finish the book by the end of the year.
- We will credit you with the strip in the book itself.
- And yes, you can submit up to 2 strips for us to include.
- As with all our crew books, we will not edit content, but will correct any typo's… however if a misspelling or other grammatical oddity is part of the appeal, let us know and we will leave it as is.
- Remember, the kids are in London during the same era as the Civil War in the U.S., so no mention of tv, movies, radio shows, basketball, etc…
- Don't worry if your idea is close to one of our past strips… just give us your take on the kids (heck, I can't remember all the strips I've written at this point!)
- And as always, this is a family strip…

In case you need an example, this is the format you may want to submit…

Panel 1:
Stamford: My father took me to his favorite pub this weekend.
Watson: Aren't you a little young to take up drinking?

Panel 2:
Stamford: My mother told him that God was watching him when he went to the tavern… I was to distract God by throwing a tantrum while dad was downing the pints.
Watson: Interesting approach by your dad.

Panel 3:
Holmes: My mother believes bars and taverns only exist to dilute the reality of our existence… I believe she may have been referring to your father.

I hope you will consider participating in this project… it will be a great way to end the 10th year…

LARGE JELLYFISH WASHING UP ON MAINE BEACHES: SCIENTIST SHARES WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Jim Keithley, June 24, 2025

SOUTH PORTLAND, Maine —

As we mark 50 years since the movie "Jaws" hit theaters, there is something else lurking in the water and these creatures are washing up on Maine beaches.

A lion's mane jellyfish that was nearly 5 feet wide was spotted at Willard Beach in South Portland over the weekend. Another one was discovered in a tide pool in Scarborough. The Eliot Police Department posted a photo of the same type of jellyfish at the Eliot Boat Basin.

Scientists say lion's mane jellyfish have tentacles that can stretch more than 100 feet and they deliver a painful sting.

"You're not supposed to touch anything you find or see on the beach because you never know what it is," said Dr. Jerome Pinti, a senior scientist at the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland.

Pinti studies jellyfish and said this species is very common.

"Whether there are more or not in the Gulf of Maine, we're not really sure," Pinti said. "There are anecdotal reports of more sightings, but is that because there are more jellyfish or is that because there are way more people going to the beach than there used to be?"

Pinti said there is no real way to track jellyfish like sharks and other fish, and that jellyfish come and go depending on the tides and the winds.

Maine's Total Coverage asked Pinti if a lion's mane jellyfish is dangerous and what happens if someone gets stung.

"They would hurt. They would burn. But in general, it's not dangerous unless you are allergic to it," Pinti said. "If you get stung, you should try to remove the tentacles using sand or using salt water."

People who were at Willard Beach on Tuesday said they heard about the jellyfish sightings but were not really giving it a second thought.

"I just saw a picture of a big old blob in the ocean, which I then said: 'Oh, I'll remember that,' and you see me not remembering," said Portland resident Cydney Andreoli.

People who see a lion's mane jellyfish at the beach should notify the lifeguards. They are trained on how to get them back into the ocean and use a special shovel to do so.

The Eliot Police Department said pets should be kept away from jellyfish because stings can lead to serious injury or illness.

THE MATHEMATICS OF MRS. WATSON

Ronald Knox, Baker Street Miscellanea, No.2 July 1975

It is pleasant to notice that interest in the Holmes problem is reviving. Here are two monographs published almost simultaneously. Mr. Bell's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson and Mr. Blakeney's Sherlock Holmes, *Fact or Fiction*. It is a pity that neither should have been published in a form which appeals to scholars; neither is provided with an index; so that cross-referencing is a work of infinite labour. Both authors seem to accept as genuine fact. not only the preposterous episodes of The Return, but the futile insipidities of *The Case Book* and *His Last Bow*. Much ink is consequently wasted over the supposed "second" and "third" marriages of Watson. "One forces oneself." as M. Piff-pouff says. "to make a Bluebeard of Watson that one may make of Holmes a Rip van Winkle." Apart from this. Mr. Blakeney's treatment is on the whole sane and conservative. welcome evidence of a return to truer standards. Mr. Bell is still tangled in the hopeless web spun by Mr. S. C. Roberts and Mr. Desmond MacCarthy.

He dates *The Sign of Four* 1887. and consequently his whole monograph is a juggling feat. For myself. though I have been misrepresented on this point. I have always claimed 1888 as the true date. and that conclusion stands as unshakable to-day as it did twenty years ago.

Our problem in dating the Sign of Four is threefold. We must determine. if possible. the month. the day of the week. And the year of occurrence. All three questions are intensely involved.

(a) The Month. -- Mr. Blakeney gives us July 7; the date of the post-mark on Thaddaeus Sholto's letter. making an assignation for that night. which is kept. Mr. Bell. with equal confidence. gives us September 7, a Wednesday in that year; he bases his view on the statement in Ch. II that "it was a September evening." He has been astute enough to notice the oysters on Holmes's menu as indicating September. The grouse, too, would be impossible in July; so would the fog. But it is characteristic of his method that he does not stop to consider how "July" can have been the date of Sholto's letter, and have passed the scrutiny of a Holmes without comment.

Still less does he look about him for other indications which tell against his own hypothesis; let me present him with some. "It had just struck three on the Palace Clock" when Watson came back to Pondicherry Lodge with the invaluable Toby. Holmes climbs out on to the roof and down a water pipe, and the chase starts; "the east had been gradually whitening, and we could now see some distance in the cold grey light". Was this meant to be on Sept. 8, when the sun rises at 5.24, or on July 8, when the sun rises at 3.53? Still more serious; in the final chase, Holmes and his party board their launch at Westminster Bridge "a little past seven); they have to be at Jacobson's Yard before eight.

"As we passed the City the last rays of the sun were gilding the cross upon the summit of St. Paul's". That cross is, to be sure, 365 feet above the ground, but this does not involve any considerable time-interval. On September the 10th the sun sets at 6.27; on July 10th it sets at 8.14. Here it seems that an intervening date is indicated, some time in August, July and September are alike impossible. I would add that Athelney Jones says it is "very hot for this time of the year," which rules out July and August, and can hardly be considered a natural remark to make during the early part of September.

I agree with Mr. Bell that the balance of probabilities is in favor of September; but difficulties must be faced, not slacked, and there is a great deal of work to be done on T*he Sign of Four* before we can afford to say lightheartedly "That the month was September is evident."

(b) The day of the week. -- In any case, I do not see what right Mr. Bell has to choose September 7 as the date of Miss Morstan's appearance at Baker Street. Once you have given up on July 7, you cannot pretend to know anything about the day of the month. And Mr. Bell's treatment of this minor problem is falsified by a startling inaccuracy. He says that the action of the story "is from the afternoon of the 7th until the night of the 8th." Let him go back to his original, and he will find that Watson had twice breakfasted between the afternoon following the murder and the afternoon of the final chase.

The embarkation at Westminster Bridge took place three whole days after the meeting outside the Lyceum Theatre. If the former date was a Wednesday, the latter must have been a Saturday. If it was a Saturday, how are men

"coming away from work in the yard"- between seven and eight, swarming (we are told) in the gas light? Worse, Holmes's advertisement for Mordecai Smith (clearly preserved verbatim in Watson's notes) describes him as having left home at three on Tuesday morning. On Mr. Bell's showing it should have been Thursday. In actual fact, Miss Morstan called at Baker Street, it would seem, on a Monday, and Jonathan Small was captured the following Thursday. If Monday was September 7, then the year would be 1885, which, as we shall see, is impossible. No, the day of the month -- Mr. Bell must pardon me for insisting on it -- cannot be determined.

(c) T*he year of the occurrence*. -- The evidence on this head is well summed up by Mr. Blakeney, who declares for 1888. Mr. Bell, who belongs to the 1887 school, is far less lucid and less accurate in his presentation. He begins by assuring us that "Father Ronald Knox … selects the year 1889." Let him buy my book, the title of which is *Essays (not Studies) in Satire*, and he will find that I have explicitly dated the story 1888. He should not depend upon second-hand authorities, Mr. Roberts or another.

There is no real doubt about the 1888 dating. Miss Morstan was seventeen in 1878, and at the time of the story Watson reflects "she must be seven-and-twenty now").

"On such matters," writes M. Papier-Hache, "one does not deceive oneself." The 4th of May, 1882, is "about six years ago", and December 3, 1878, is "nearly ten years ago". Watson refers to Sholto's first letter as written six years ago, and Holmes assumes that the treasure-seekers were six years at work. It was left for Mr. Desmond MacCarthy to point out a difficulty which several authors, including Mr. Roberts and Mr. Bell, have thought fatal. If the first pearl was sent in May, 1882, then by the summer of 1888 Miss Morstan should have received seven not six!

Mr. Blakeney's explanation, that there were seven pearls although only six were exhibited will not do. There were twelve pearls in the chaplet, Small tells us, and the Sholtoes were not the men to give back more than half to their co-heiress. No, the source of the error is manifest. The advertisement appeared, the first pearl was sent, in May 1883 -- not 1882. Miss Morstan's error was a natural one; she counted the years, wrongly, by the pearls, and said that the first pearl arrived "six years ago." Then, calculating back from 1888, she made the year 1882; the result of calculation, not memory.

Holmes accepted her statement, and even regarded it as a "suggestive fact," that the first pearl was sent within a week after Sholto's death. He should have said "a blank impossibility."

Why did neither he nor Mr. Desmond MacCarthy reflect that before they started throwing the pearls about the Sholto brothers had to *prove the will*? As a matter of fact, nothing was done in a hurry. "For weeks and for months we dug and delved in every part of the garden… Over this chaplet my brother and I had some little discussion… It was all I could do to persuade him to let me find out Miss Morstan's address and send her a detached pearl at fixed intervals".

Surely nobody reading these words would believe, as Mr. Desmond MacCarthy wants us to believe, that Sholto died on Friday. April 28th, and by Thursady the first pearl reached its destination!

Watson married at the end of October. 1888. A few weeks before this Lord Robert St Simon (who had apparently been given a barony as "Lord St. Simon" in recognition of his public services, since both title are used). is described as "41 years of age". Naturally enough. if he was born in December, 1846, MacCarthy and his followers are barking up the wrong tree when they try to make a mystery out of this. Sometime after the marriage comes *A Scandal in Bohemia*.

The year given. 1888, is plainly a misprint; for as Mr. Bell himself points out. The day was a Thursday. and March 20; March 20 was a Tuesday in 1888. a Thursday. therefore. in 1890. Meanwhile. as Mr. Blakeney points out. the year 1888 must be taken as the year of the marriage if we are to arrange the other stories in their true chronological order; he mentions five cases of this kind; "Mr. MacCarthy's dating of *The Sign of Four…* clashes with every other date in the record." Thus, “The Engineer's Thumb” is explicitly dated "the summer of '89. not long after my marriage"; Mr. Bell solves this difficulty by amending "'89" to "'88"!

The only real puzzle is “The Five Orange Pips.” There can be no doubt at all that the date of this is September, 1887. When Holmes says. "I have been beaten… three times by men, and once by a woman," this does not prove. as Mr. Bell thinks, that the story comes after *A Scandal in Bohemia*, and therefore *a fortiori* after the marriage.

"When he refers to Irene Adler… it is always under the honorable title of the wcman"); "a woman" must be somebody else. The year was 1887; yet we read "my wife was away on a visit to her mother's." (So runs the text in *The Strand Magazine* and again in the definitive Complete Edition.)

There can be no doubt. however. that the note is the gloss of an ignorant scholiast. Mrs. Watson's mother died when she was young (*The Sign of Four*). "One forgets many things." observes M. Piff-pouff with his usual shrewdness, "but the death of one's mother-in-law. not." This article has necessarily dealt for the most part with points of detail. I can find no more fitting words to conclude it with than those of the veteran Sauwosch: "It is not to be feared that the Holmes-problem is a mine which suffers from a diminishing-returns law. Watson had this genius. that. However deeply we probe his work. he has always fresh inconsistencies to reveal. which will be the basis of fresh theories. That is good; yes."

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT *THE SIGN OF FOUR*

1. Summary (Diogenes Club)

When the story opens, Holmes has been using a 7% solution of cocaine for a number of days and Watson protests. Mary visits Holmes to ask his advice. Her mother has been dead since she was a child. Her father was an officer in the army, stationed in India. She has not seen him for years and has been raised in a boarding school.

Ten years prior, her father wrote that he was coming home to London. She received a wire that he had arrived at a hotel. She went to the hotel but her father had gone out the night before and was never seen again. Major Sholto was a retired member of her father's regiment and was living in London at the time of his disappearance. The two had been stationed together in the Andaman Islands. Four years after Col. Morstan's disappearance, Maj. Sholto died.

Since Sholto's death (i.e. - for the past six years) Mary has received a very valuable pearl by mail on her birthday. The day before her visit to Holmes, she received an unsigned note requesting that she meet the author outside a theater. Mary found a treasure map, signed by the four, among her father's effects. Holmes and Mary go to the theater and are whisked away by carriage to meet Thaddeus.

Thaddeus lives in luxury in an apartment. He tells them that his father brought a great treasure home with him from India. Part of this treasure belonged to Col. Morstan who came to claim it immediately upon his arrival in London. Maj. Sholto, on his death bed confessed that the two of them had quarreled over the split and Morstan (who had a weak heart) had a heart attack and died.

Maj. Sholto was about to reveal the whereabouts of the treasure to his sons when he saw a face at the window and the sight finished him. At the time of their father's death, Thaddeus and Bartholomew searched the grounds of their home exhaustively but found no trace of the treasure.

Bartholomew discovered it at last, just a day ago, and Thaddeus wants to share it with Mary to make up for his father's shortcomings. Bartholomew reluctantly agreed. The four (Holmes, Watson, Mary and Thaddeus) go to Bartholomew's house only to find that he has been murdered by a poisoned thorn and the treasure stolen.

The murderer stepped in creosote on the floor of Bartholomew's lab. Holmes puts Toby on this scent and Toby leads them to a wharf on the Thames where Holmes learns that his quarry has rented a steam launch and gone away about 24 hours before. Holmes has the Baker Street Irregulars, under the leadership of Wiggins, search up and down the Thames for the Aurora but she cannot be found.

Holmes himself searches, disguised as a sailor. He finds the ship in dry dock having her rudder checked and learns that Mordacai Smith et al will be leaving at 8:00 PM. He contacts Jones to have a police launch ready across the river from the dry dock and follows the Aurora when she leaves. The Aurora is headed for the Esmeralda, outward bound for the Brazils.

The police boat catches the Aurora after an exciting chase during which the islander shoots a poisoned dart at Holmes and Watson and is in turn shot by them. He falls overboard and is drowned. Watson takes the treasure chest to Mary and when it is opened, it is found to be empty. Since there is no longer a fortune between them, Watson proposes and Mary accepts.

After it became obvious that they would be overtaken and captured, Small scattered the treasure over a 5 mile stretch of the Thames. Small tells his story to Holmes et al: He was in the army in India and after a series of adventures, ended up in a fort in Agra during the rebellion. He and three of his Sikh companions stole the treasure from the servant of a rajah whom they murdered. After the rebellion was over, they were caught, tried and convicted of murder. The four ended up a convicts in the Andaman Islands.

Sholto and Morstan were officers assigned to prison duty. Small made a deal with them that he would tell where the treasure was hidden if the officers would assist the four to escape. However, Sholto double crossed Small, Morstan and the others, took the treasure and returned to England.

Small's job in the prison was assisting the doctor so he had picked up some medical knowledge. He found a native, Tonga, who was near death and nursed him back to health. They become fast friends. Tonga had a boat and helped Small escape. It took Small and Tonga several years to get back to London. Sholto kept guards about himself constantly and Small could not get at him until the night of his (Sholto's) death.

Watson marries Mary and Holmes returns to cocaine. We are not told of Small's fate.

2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo's Camp)

- First published in:
  Lippincott's Magazine, February 1890 Note: Some more modern editions call it *The Sign of Four*, some don't.

- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
  September 1888 (generally accepted, but the month is somewhat arguable)

- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
  Sharing bachelor quarters at 221B.

- Opening scene:
  Holmes was shooting up cocaine. Watson criticized Holmes' use of the drug. Holmes explained his business as a consulting detective to Watson, told of his monographs on the art of detection, criticized Watson's small brochure that he had given the somewhat fantastic title of A Study in Scarlet, and waxed on with eloquence about the Science of Deduction. Then, a client. A crisp knock, and the landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

- Client:
  Miss Mary Morstan, a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and dressed in the most perfect taste. She looked sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. Watson was smitten. In his experience of women which extended over three continents, never had he seen such a clear promise of a refined and sensitive nature. Not only that, but her lip trembled and she quivered.

- Crime or concern:
  Client found herself in a strange and utterly inexplicable situation. She was 27 years of age, and had been raised in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh, her mother being deceased and her father an army officer stationed in India. He came to England on extended leave and wired his daughter to meet him in London. At his hotel, she found he had gone out the night before and did not return. That was 10 years previous, and he was not seen again.
  Then, four years later, she received in the mail a box containing a very large and lustrous pearl, a rare variety of considerable value. Then every year since, upon the same date, another pearl. No explanation or anything ever enclosed except the pearl itself. Then, a letter, requesting her to meet an "unknown friend", and she could bring with her two friends, but no police. The letter said she was a wronged woman and would have justice.

- Villain:
  There was villainy on several levels; theft of a treasure, murder, intrigue, bribery, betrayal, etc. It began during The Indian Mutiny, or India's First War of Independence, the term dependent upon your point of view. Achmet, a rich merchant, had been entrusted with the Rajah's treasure, but was playing both sides of the game, and he in turn was watched. The Four (Jonathon Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar.), killed him and stole the treasure and swore a solemn pact. After the rebellion was put down, the Four were jailed for the murder. The Rajah had been deposed so only the Four knew of the treasure. Then they bribed Major Sholto and Captain Morstan, British officers, to help them escape, for a share of the treasure. Sholto crossed them all and took the whole treasure to England, and Small became obsessed with killing him.

- Motive:
  The Great Agra Treasure, said to be worth £500,000. Unimaginable wealth. And for Small, even the treasure had come to be a smaller thing in his mind than the slaying of Sholto.

- Logic / clues used to solve:
  Holmes determined Maj. Sholto had died shortly before the pearls started to come. Holmes asked why the presents begin immediately after Sholto's death unless it was that Sholto's heir desired to make some compensation.
  The treasure map had the names of the Four, and only one white man's name was among them. The others were Hindoos or Mohammedans, which allowed Holmes to identify Small. He knew that Maj. Sholto had a dreadful fear of a white man with a wooden leg.
  Observation that one of the intruders had stepped in creosote allowed Holmes, helped by Toby the dog, track them to the Aurora's dock, the boat Small intended to escape on, with his companion Tonga and the treasure. Their plan was to board the Esmeralda, bound for Brazil.

- Policemen:

  Mr. Altheny Jones and an inspector in uniform.

- Holmes' fees:

  At the end, Watson remarked: "You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?" Reply: "For me," said Sherlock Holmes, "there still remains the cocaine-bottle." And he stretched his long white hand up for it.

- Transport:

  Holmes & Watson and Miss Morstan took a cab to their appointment with the unknown man, who then took them on a long ride in a four-wheeler to the apartment of Thaddeus Sholto, the Major's son. After explanations, the four of them took the cab on to brother Bartholomew's, home, Pondicherry Lodge.

  After finding the brother dead, Thaddeus drove down to the station to report the matter to the police, presumably in a cab. He returned with the police.

  Watson escorted Miss Morstan home in the cab the police had brought, and stopped to pick up Toby

  4 | P a g e T h e S i g n o f F o u r

  the dog, and took him back to Pondicherry lodge.

  Then, with Toby on the scent, Holmes & Watson went for a six-mile trudge to a small wooden wharf at the end of Broad Street. From there they found a boatman with a wherry and crossed the river, and then took a hansom to 221B.

  The BSI's scrambled off on foot to find the Aurora.

  Watson went back to Camberwell to "check on" Miss Morstan, by unspecified means, and then returned.

- Food:

  After returning from the overnight quest, Watson found Holmes had the breakfast laid (ham & eggs) and was pouring out the coffee.

- Drink:

  Watson decided to confront Holmes about his use of drugs, and was not sure if it was Holmes' deliberate manner, which Watson found offensive, or the Beaune (red wine from Burgundy) which Watson had taken with his lunch, that set him off.

  Holmes determined that the older brother of Watson was a drunkard, by examination of his watch.

  Sholto offered Miss Morstan a glass of wine, Chianti or Tokay. (He kept no other wines.)

  Toby the dog put his nose to the creosote like a connoisseur sniffing the bouquet of a famous vintage, but of course he did not drink any creosote.

  While Holmes was out looking for the Aurora, Altheny Jones called. He and Watson had a whisky and soda (Jones, only a half-glass).

  Before setting out for the boat-chase, Holmes invited Altheny Jones to dine with them. The menu was oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little choice in white wines. After the table was cleared Holmes glanced at his watch and filled up three glasses with port. "One bumper," said he, "to the success of our little expedition."

  Holmes found the Aurora in a repair yard, along with Mordecai Smith, who was very flush of money and rather the worse for liquor.

  Following the capture of Johnathon Small, Holmes advised him to take a pull out of the flask, for he was very wet. Altheny Jones then entered the cabin and announced he too would have a pull at the flask.

  Later, while Small was telling his story, he stopped and held out his manacled hands for the whisky and water which Holmes had brewed for him.

- Vices:

  While telling Watson about his consultation by the French Detective Francois le Villard, Holmes filled up his old brier-root pipe.

  While a trustee in the military prison, Small took his cheroot from his lips, and asked Maj. Sholto a question about the treasure.

  After the initial visit by his client Mary Morstan, Holmes had lit his pipe again.

  Sholto applied a taper to the great bowl of his hookah, and explained he found the balsamic odour of the Eastern tobacco to be an invaluable sedative. The smoke bubbled merrily through the rose-water, and he puffed uneasily.

  Later, back at Pondicherry Lodge, Holmes was standing on the doorstep with his hands in his pockets, smoking his pipe.

After sending the BSI's to find the steam-launch Aurora, Holmes told Watson he planned to to smoke and to think over the queer business.

Holmes & Watson and Jones had a cigar after Holmes found the Aurora.

After capturing Small, Holmes offered him a cigar.

At end of the little drama, Holmes and Watson had sat some time smoking in silence at 221B.

While holed up in the fort at Agra, Johathan Small took out his pipe and laid down his musket to strike a match (not a wise move).

- Other cases mentioned:

  STUD. That of Mrs. Cecil Forrester, in which Holmes unraveled a little domestic complication. The Bishopgate Jewel case.

- Notable Quotables:

  "I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection." – Holmes "

  "I never guess. It is a shocking habit — destructive to the logical faculty." – Holmes

  "Women are never to be entirely trusted — not the best of them." – Holmes

  "There is something devilish in this, Watson, what do you make of it?" – Holmes

- Other interestings:

  Holmes recommended Watson read a book, Winwood Reade's Martyrdom of Man, which he called one of the most remarkable ever penned.

- When all was said and done:

  Small finally made it to England with a native companion, Tonga. Capt. Morstan later arrived, but died of a heart attack arguing with Maj. Sholto. Sholto hid the treasure and disposed of Morstan's body on the sly, but then died. His sons found the treasure and sent some of the pearls to Miss Morstan, believing she had been wronged.

  Small tracked down the Sholtos, and he and his companion Tonga took the treasure. Tonga killed Maj. Sholto's son, Bartholomew, who had found the treasure. Based on Miss Morstan's story and evidence at the crime scene Holmes traced Jonathan Small and Tonga, who planned to escape to Brazil, and chased them down the Thames by steam-launch. Tonga was shot and killed and Small was captured, but not before he dumped the treasure into the Thames, spread out and unrecoverable. With the treasure no longer between them, Watson became engaged to Mary Morstan. Small was taken into custody but the story does not tell us what happened to him.

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3. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	1888
b.	William Baring-Gould	Tuesday, September 18, 1888
c.	H.W. Bell	Wednesday, September 7, 1887
d.	Roger Butters	July, 1887
e.	Jay Finley Christ	Tuesday, September 25, 1888
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Tuesday, June 7, 1887
g.	D. Martin Dakin	Thursday, September 28, 1888
h.	Bill Dorn	Thursday, April 19, 1888
i.	Henry Folsom	Tuesday, July 17, 1888
j.	John Hall	July 7, or September, 1888
k.	Craig Janasek	Tuesday, September 18, 1888

l.	Brad Keefauver	Tuesday, September 4, 1888
m.	Toshio Suzuki	Friday, September 7, 1888
n.	June Thomson	July 7, or September, 1888
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	Monday, April 16, 1888

4. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- Why did Capt. Morstan stay at the Langham Hotel, described by Baedeker as “a great American resort”?
- Why did Mary Morstan have six pearls?
- Why was the letter from Thaddeus Sholto said to be postmarked “London, S.W.”?
- How high were the ceilings in Pondicherry Lodge?
- What was the floor plan of Pondicherry Lodge and how were the grounds laid out?
- How did Holmes and Watson maneuver in a four-foot high garret?
- Where was Pinchin Lane?
- How did Holmes know that it would be “a six-mile trudge”?
- Why did Holmes refer to “their eight-and-twenty hour start”?
- Since Watson saw Holmes leave in the a.m. “in a rude sailor dress,” why was he taken in when Holmes returned?
- What was the validity of Small’s (and others’) rationalizations as to the rightful owner of the Agra treasure?
- Is there any contradiction between Watson’s “the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city” and Jones’ comment three days later that “It is very hot for the time of year”?

5. 17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. Watson's Flaw

The Sign of the Four begins by showing us a major flaw in our hero's character, his cocaine usage. Watson, it would seem, does not make it through the tale without showing a flaw of his own: "I could have struck the man across the face, so hot was I at this callous and offhand reference to so delicate a matter."

Why is violence Watson's immediate reaction? True, he does not act upon the impulse this time, but were there other times he was not so restrained? Had he previously struck anyone across the face for a remark that offended him? This could give credence for the "bad temper" school of though on his "bull pup."

2. The Doc From Down Under

If Watson did have bad habits like smacking mouthy fellows across the face, it might indicate a childhood in some less civilized land, and SIGN gives us some handy evidence of that in his words: "I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work."

Watson's Australian past is often overlooked by Sherlockians, and it is especially fascinating that he encounters some fellow citizens of good old Ballarat in "Reigate Squires." Did Watson's family wind up coming to England in much the same way that Turner and McCarthy did? Might there even be a connection?

3. Gossip Time:

Mrs. Bernstone, the housekeeper at Pondicherry Lodge, says: I have seen Mr. Bartholomew Sholto in joy and in sorrow for ten long years, but I never saw him with such a face on him as that."

Was the housekeeper having a romantic relationship with Bartholomew Sholto? Somehow it seems like she's seen a lot of emotion out of her employer.

4. One More Paying Customer

"Don't trouble yourself about it, Mr. Sholto," said Holmes; "I think that I can engage to clear you of the charge."

Was Holmes going to charge Sholto? Was his full meaning "I can be engaged for a reasonable fee"? Long before the ambulance-chasing lawyer, was Sherlock the Scotland Yard-chasing detective? It would seem that Athelney Jones alone could have made him quite a bit of money.

5. Just Wondering . . .

"I shall bring him then," said I. "It is one now. I ought to be back before three if I can get a fresh horse."

Fresh horse? From where?

6. Tonga's Death Warrant

"I have my stick."

"It is just possible that we may need something of the sort if we get to their lair. Jonathan I shall leave to you, but if the other turns nasty I shall shoot him dead."

Holmes is very definite about his plans for Tonga. Would he have felt the same about a normal Briton criminal, or was the fact that he was dealing with a "wild" pygmy frightening him into thinking of Tonga as a mad dog, less than human? Is Holmes intending self-defense or an excuse for premeditated capital punishment?

7. Up, Up, And Away!

"What the deuce is the matter with the dog?" growled Holmes. "They surely would not take a cab or go off in a balloon."

Balloon travel at time of SIGN . . . just how common was it? Holmes almost makes it sound as common as cabbing in that line . . . or is he just "eliminating the impossible."

8. Bribe The Rascals

"I'd like two shillin' better," the prodigy answered after some thought.

"Here you are, then! Catch!--A fine child, Mrs. Smith!"

"Lor' bless you, sir, he is that, and forward.

At this point in his life, we've only seen Sherlock Holmes deal with children one way: throw money at them. Were shillings hard to come by around the Holmes household when he was a child? Or was money just the best calling card for anyone in the lower classes at the time?

9. Rowboat For Hire

"There is a boatman here with a wherry, Watson. We shall take it and cross the river."

While we all remember the steamboat chase in SIGN, this little rowboat trip across the Thames often gets missed. Were small boat ferrymen as common as cabs on the river? Would you yourself cross the Thames in a rowboat?

10. Sleep, Give Me Sleep!

At "between eight and nine o'clock" in the morning after running around all night, Watson describes himself as "limp and weary, befogged in mind and fatigued in body." He has already protested earlier in the story that he still hasn't recovered from Afghanistan. But he takes a bath, changes clothes, comes down for breakfast and seems ready to go some more.

Now, be honest. At this point wouldn't you be going, "You're the detective, I'm going to bed!"? What did Watson hope to contribute/accomplish? And when Holmes does lull him into napping, Watson doesn't even go to his nearby bed . . . just sacking out on the couch. Oh, my aching back/war wound!

11. Run For It, Watson!

"I think that we have had a close shave ourselves of being arrested for the crime."

"So do I. I wouldn't answer for our safety now if he should happen to have another of his attacks of energy."

At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and dismay.

"By heavens, Holmes," I said, half rising, "I believe that they are really after us."

What was Watson about to do? Make a break for it?

12. Without A Microwave!

"Only that I insist upon your dining with us. It will be ready in half an hour. I have oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little choice in white wines.--Watson, you have never yet recognized my merits as a housekeeper."

Perhaps one of our more grouse and oyster savvy Hounds can help me on this one: I have problems whipping hot dogs and steamed veggies together in a half an hour, how can Holmes can cook oysters and grouse in that time?

13. It's In The Other South America

"We told him nothing; but we paid him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our vessel, the Esmeralda, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils."

Someone aid my confusion on this one: was there more than one Brazil in the 1880s??

14. Show Me The Money!

"Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson," said she.

Um, excuse me, Mary, but the man just brought a treasure chest in for you. Polite, I can understand, but I have to ask my fellow Hounds: Isn't she taking polite a bit far here? Wouldn't you want to see what's in the box and THEN hear the story? Ah, but they were better folk then, weren't they?

15. And I Haven't Even Touched Mine

"I must borrow Mrs. Forrester's poker."

Fireplace pokers get a lot of use in the Canon. Watson opens a strongbox with one here, and later prepares to bash Steve Dixie with one. As a murder weapon or a contest of strength, the simple poker gets a lot of mileage in the Canon. Any thoughts on why?

16. You Can't Bribe These Guys

"There goes the reward!" the nameless inspector says. "Where there is no money there is no pay. This night's work would have been worth a tenner each to Sam Brown and me if the treasure had been there."

Scotland Yard working on commission? Along with Lestrade being "retained" in "Boscombe Valley Mystery," this is one of the more puzzling aspects of the London police force. How easily hired were they?

17. Unbelievable Small

Jonathan Small scatters the Agra treasure over "five miles or so" of Thames riverbed. He says he was "half mad" when he did it, but five miles is a long time for temporary insanity. Can you picture any criminal giving up that kind of money, when there was the slightest chance he might have been able to get it back somehow?

An added note: with Holmes's eye for detail and memory for location, might he not have been out the next day with a boatload of Irregulars for a little urban pearl-diving?

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6. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

“I’d like two shillin’ better,” said little Jack Smith, and there are plenty of characters in The Sign of Four who followed his philosophy. But there are also the knights errant: Holmes, working for the love of his art, and Watson, working for love. The story could serve as a study in Victorian ambivalence toward the desirability of wealth versus the acceptable means of AGRA-ndizement. Luckily for us readers, however, this is a study that comes complete with a missing treasure, a chilling murder, some classic deductions by Sherlock Holmes, a fascinating pursuit on land, an exciting chase on the river, some sweet romantic moments, a boatload of characters worthy of Dickens — and, as they say, much, much more! Whoever lost a treasure, this is one that we Sherlockians get to keep! (And by the time Jonathan Small finished his boat ride, all of the gems in the Agra treasure were “of the first water.”)

Money Changes Everything: “Whose was it? His who is gone. Who shall have it?” No, we haven’t started to discuss “The Musgrave Ritual” by mistake: I mean the Agra treasure, of course. Who has a right to it, morally or legally or any way under the sun? And if Mary Morstan had gotten it, would Watson really have had to give up all hopes of marrying her, even if it were partly through his efforts that she came into her wealth? Why was it acceptable for Lord Robert St. Simon, “The Noble Bachelor,” to court Hatty Doran, but not for Watson to propose to Mary? Was there some social double standard at work when it came to marrying for money?

The apportionment of virtue in The Sign of Four is as haphazard as the scattering of the Agra treasure. Murderous little Tonga was “staunch and true” to his friend, while an officer of the British Army broke his most solemn oath in order to satisfy his greed. Jonathan Small and his companions killed Achmet for the treasure, but they remained loyal to each other. His loyalty and candor give a certain appeal to the character of Small, and it surprised me to read of Watson’s disgust and contempt for the unfortunate convict. Are we supposed to share Watson’s sense of outrage, or are we meant to feel sympathetic to Small? Was there a social prejudice in operation at the time the story was written, so that Small was automatically supposed to be cast as the villain in the reader’s eyes, or are we in our times a bit more inclined to excuse crimes if the transgressor himself has suffered some prior injustice?

Sherlock Holmes Demonstrates: Why is Holmes so sure that Lal Rao is the accomplice who gave Small the inside information on the workings of the Sholto household? Isn't it possible that Mrs. Bernstone was the person with whom Small "made friends?" Is that why she was so upset at the murder of Bartholomew Sholto: because she had helped with the theft, but had been assured there would be no violence?

An aspect of the story that has always puzzled me is Holmes's apparent certainty that Small would take the Aurora into hiding for a day or two, rather than head straight down the river to rendezvous with an outward-bound ship. Wasn't it really much more likely that if Small had planned his escape via the steam launch to begin with, he would have timed the theft of the treasure according to the Esmeralda's scheduled date of departure for "the Brazils?" Can any of the Hounds give a more satisfactory explanation for the delay than the one Holmes gave, an explanation which did not sound completely sea-worthy even to Watson?

Holmes quoted "one of our greatest statesmen" as saying, "A change of work is the best rest." Is this a genuine quotation, and does anyone know its source?

Details: When Jonathan Small and his friends hid a body and a treasure in the old fort at Agra, the body was found but not the treasure. Ironically, when Major Sholto hid both a body and a treasure, the treasure was found, but not the body. What do you make of the fact that Mary Morstan never asked if anyone could tell her how to locate her father's remains?

On the night Bartholomew Sholto's body was discovered, Athelney Jones arrived on the scene with an inspector in uniform. He called his companion "Sergeant" in one instance and "Inspector" in another. Can anyone explain Jones's interchange of the two terms?

Tonga entered Pondicherry Lodge through the roof and tossed down a rope so that Jonathan Small could climb up more easily. The rope was secured to a great hook in the wall. Assuming that the Sholtos didn't have the hook installed expressly for the convenience of treasure-grabbing intruders, what WAS the hook doing there? Were "great hooks" a popular feature in Victorian decor?

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7. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

First half

"Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions," says Sherlock Holmes.

This tale is — unlike many others in the Canon — essentially about the middle class and the suburbs, rather than the older parts of London with which Sherlock Holmes is usually associated.

What attitudes does it take?

Second half

"It is a romance!" cried Mrs. Forrester. "An injured lady, half a mil-lion in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian."

Is "The Sign of the Four" so well-loved by readers of Sherlock Holmes because of these exotic elements, or in spite of them?

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8. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

This Adventure has something for everyone: exotic locales; fierce Sikh warriors; a cannibal shooting poison darts; a bearded, one-legged villain; a fabulous treasure; secret hiding places; revenge; war; violent death; betrayal; and romance. It even has the Victorian version of a wild chase scene. Yet, at the end, Holmes seems to have been left out in terms of being given credit for his sleuthing, or a reward for running the malefactors to ground…er, mire.

The Sepoy Mutiny (February 1857 – July 1859) was thought to have been triggered by a seditious rumor. Opponents of the British rule circulated word that British rifle-cartridges had been dipped in pork tallow (the cartridges were paper and needed to be sealed in some way against dampness). Since the procedure for loading a musket entailed biting off the end of the paper cartridge, this was a monstrous affront to the devoutly Muslim Sepoys who rose up in religious fervor. This Adventure provides a vivid depiction of the carnage and chaos that ran rampant in India for more than two years.

Against this background stands Jonathan Small, implacable Seeker of the Great Agra Treasure. In some ways, he has always reminded me of Long John Silver in Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island. Small is a cunning, remorseless, peg-legged treasure hunter who will stick at nothing to recover Achmet's jewel-chest and take revenge on the one who betrayed The Four.

Some thoughts (painful, but not fatal) which may be worthy of discussion come to mind:

- Crocodiles have no way to chew their food. Consequently, they seize their prey with their jaws and then spin rapidly to literally tear off a piece that can be swallowed whole. Yet Jonathan Small says a crocodile "nipped off my right leg as clean as a surgeon could have done it, just above the knee." I believe that alarge crocodile could have sheared through Small's leg, but the wound would not have resembled a surgical procedure. And trauma plus the loss of blood would have been fatal in a very short space of time. All of which makes me wonder: Was Small being truthful about how he lost his leg, and if he was lying, what would his purpose for doing so have been?
- Watson professed his reluctance to reveal his love for Mary Morstan, ostensibly because he did not want to be viewed as a gigolo who proposed marriage to her so that he could lay hands on a vast treasure. And when it was revealed that the treasure was gone (at this point he does not know that it is irretrievably gone), he proposed to Mary. Was it because the treasure no longer stood in his way, or because he wanted to make sure of getting access to the only remaining portion of the treasure: the pearls sent to Mary by Thaddeus Sholto?
- I have sometimes wondered what kind of thorn Tonga used for his poison darts. And why were their ends rounded? Wouldn't it have allowed greater pressure to build up behind them in the blow-gun if the ends were squared off, particularly in a blowgun the length of a school ruler?
- What was old Mr. Sherman's purpose in keeping his remarkable menagerie? And how did he come to refer to Holmes familiarly as "Mr. Sherlock"?
- Small said about his slaying of the Pathan prison guard: "With three long hops I was on him." How far might a man hop with one leg? Would it be far enough that three hops would have been a sufficient distance to prevent detection by the guard while Small unstrapped his leg?

• Watson wrote of "…the great rubbish-heaps which cumbered the grounds…" of Pondicherry Lodge, and remarked to Miss Morstan that "It looks as though all the moles in England had been let loose in it." At that point, Holmes joined the conversation: "These are the traces of the treasure-seekers. You must remember that they were six years looking for it. No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit." This causes me to wonder whether the brothers Sholto had performed all this mighty labor by themselves, or whether the "treasure-seekers" might have been rascals who scaled the wall to have a go at finding buried treasure? I have also wondered what clues or flights of imagination might have led whoever it was to dig about in the grounds?

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9. Questions & Comments (Sonia Fetherston, BSI)

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10. 56 Stories in 56 Days (Charlotte Anne Walters)

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11. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

Today we shall be discussing four important things about **The Sign Of The Four**:

No, not **that** Four...although that does give me an idea for one heck of a story (which is why they don't let me write comics books or **Sherlock Holmes** stories). No, I meant this: Let's begin, shall we?

Sign The First: You know, we don't even know the *actual title* of this novel, which is weird, if you think about it.

As you can see from the above picture, in the novel's first publication, it was clearly entitled **The Sign Of The Four**. *Five* words. *Two* "the's." But upon subsequent publications, that second "the" would sometimes be there, sometimes not:

The text itself is no help, as while the majority of the novel's references are to the 5-word version, on at least two occasions the 4-word version is used.

Careless writing? Poor proofreading? Typesetting errors? No one can say--I read (somewhere--source long forgotten, I'm afraid) that the original manuscript is in the possession of a private collector who refuses to let anyone see it. So I guess we'll have to live with the mystery, and everyone will have to decide for themselves whether the correct title has 4 or 5 words.

It's funny, because we're used to that kind of thing from older sources. What we know as **Shakespeare's** work was put together from various unauthorized sources, unsupervised by the author. The works of Homer? Translations of transcriptions from oral traditions. When you read the Bible, you're reading a translation of a translation.

But despite the canon being over a century old, somehow we think of Sherlock Holmes as being more *modern*, as not subject to such historical uncertainty or whims. This is the very definition of a trifle--it makes absolutely no difference, really, in the story, our enjoyment of it, our understanding of it. I just find it noteworthy that *no one truly knows what the actual title of the second Sherlock Holmes novel is...*

Sign The Second: This is very much a story of **John Watson**.

Of course, we already know that. He proposes at the end!! But many of the adaptations skim over that or ignore it (more on that below). And this same story gives us the first discussion of Holmes' drug use, the first time we see him in one of his disguises, the first time we meet Toby, the first mention of Holmes' boxing, his opinions on women, it's very easy to get oneself swamped by the deluge of Holmes information and forget everything we learn about Watson.

Early on, we hear Holmes dismiss Watson's written version of events in **A Study In Scarlet**. But we must remember, in **A Study in Scarlet**, Holmes criticized the detective works of **Poe** and **Gaboriau** in much the same fashion. One can almost imagine that this is Holmes' version of a *back-handed compliment,* comparing his companion's work to his predecessors. (And it hardly surprising that Watson "*attempted to tinge*" his early story with romanticism--in this case, **Mrs. Cecil Forrester** declares "It is a romance!" Surely **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** made this juxtaposition on purpose, to highlight Watson's abilities as an author.)

Although many adaptations wish to portray Watson as a dolt, that certainly *not* what Doyle intended. True, in many of the short stories, the limited storytelling space often left Watson filling the "*gaze in awe as an appreciative audience for Holmes' brilliance*" role. But not following Holmes' reasoning immediately (or having the breadth of experience and knowledge as Sherlock) is not the same as being ignorant, or a fool--see, for example, many of the fine police inspectors in the canon for an example of what Doyle considers an example of someone truly foolish.

And in this case, Watson often follows fairly closely with Holmes. When Holmes gives his famous "*eliminate the impossible*" bon mot, **Watson** *immediately* follows his reasoning and sees exactly what Sherlock was thinking. At several other points in the story, Watson keeps up with Holmes' train of thought; at others, he asks exactly the right questions. **Doyle** hardly presents **Watson** as a dunce, or a dunsel--he is intelligent, and a vital part of the team. Not having knowledge of Andaman aborigines is hardly a sign of dolthood. We also learn much personally about **John Watson**--his father, the tale of his brother's sad life the not-just-medical concern for his flat mate's drug habit. Perhaps most endearing is the insecurity he shows around a lovely woman. Despite his claim of "*an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents,*" he shows no such expertise with **Miss Mary Morstan**. His confession to (*twice*) bumbling a conversation because he finds her presence distracting is terribly charming. Add his finding of every excuse possible not to woo her--(It would be taking advantage of a women in distress!! She'll be too wealthy!!) and we see a shy, self-effacing humility. That may explain why Watson the author tends downplay the Watson in his written work in favor of Holmes. And of course, he does get the woman in the end!

Sign The Third: Adaptation is a tricky business.

What you leave in, what you take out, what you massage or expand or compress or elide are all judgement calls, especially with a franchise as popular as Sherlock Holmes. If you leave out something, you might upset the Holmes fans, presumably your core audience; but too much unnecessary detail (and, frankly, fan service), and you risk losing the casual viewer.

All of which is a way of saying that the **BBC Cushing** version of **The Sign Of The Four** kind of sucks rocks, while the **Granada** edition pretty much gets it right. Part of the problem is time, of course. The **1968** edition only had *50 minutes*, which would have made it difficult to fit the whole novel even with the best of choices. **Granada**, by contrast, made a "*feature film*" of their TSOTF, giving it gave it *103 minutes*. But a lot of the problems came down not just to time, but to disastrous choices. You'll recall in the 1968 version of **A Study In Scarlet**, they dropped the entire "**Country of Saints**" digression, trying to recap **Jefferson Hope's** entire story in two sentences. Here, again they try the same tactic, to a particularly awful result.

They do take one wise step to compress--**Sholto** and **Morstan** were *original* members of The Four, not interlopers who came in later. This saves some steps, but still theoretically keeping **Jonathan Small's** need for revenge intact. However, once Small is captured, that is it. We don't get any deep confession from him; we never learn how he and his comrades came to have the treasure; we never learn why **Small** was in prison; we never learn how or why **Major Sholto** came to take the treasure; never learn how **Small** came to have **Tonga** as an ally, or how he escaped--the entire backstory is *virtually eliminated*! As a result, as with **A Study In Scarlet**, we again have a criminal with precious little motivation presented, whose actions seem largely random, and the entire story concludes with a thud.

Granada, having the luxury of time (and a better sense of storytelling, methinks), manages to lay out the whole story, largely intact. It manages to make **Small** an actual character, not just "*this week's prop villain*," which in turn makes Holmes look all the brighter for having outwitted him.

Each version chooses to ignore the initial "*Sherlock shoots up*" scene. You don't want to show your hero as a drug addict, I guess...and quite possibly the television censors of the time wouldn't allow it, either. Both versions also *omit* **Watson's** proposal to **Mary Morstan**! In the context of a TV series, it makes sense; you can't have one of your co-stars up and leave **Baker Street** in the middle of a season. Plus, the difficulty of keeping **Morstan** around and finding a way to incorporate her each week (or explain her absence) would have proved to be a pain in the butt for the writers.

BBC **1968** takes a *silly* way out of the dilemma. In something straight from a bad romantic comedy, **Watson** observes what he thinks is **Thaddeus Sholto** proposing to **Morstan**, so like a true gentleman, he just forgets all about his attraction to her:

Really, they cut **Small's** back story for this?

Granada doesn't even try to provide an explanation. While there was some *obvious attraction* twixt **Watson** and **Morstan**, they don't do anything with it, and the end the good doctor just gazes out the window as she leaves, muttering to himself what a lovely

woman she was. *Oh, John...*

Perhaps I am too harsh on the **BBC** version. But then again, perhaps they should have thought better than to bite off such a large story to adapt into a single 50 minute episode.

Sign The Fourth. The Tonga Problem.

Look, I'll admit that I'm ill-positioned to be critical of the portrayal of aboriginal pygmy cannibals as vicious murdering maniacs.

And, as with **A Study In Scarlet** and the Mormons, what was an acceptable portrayal in **1890** might not be acceptable by current social standards. But unlike the Country Of Saints digression, you would lose too much of the story/mystery if you eliminated Tonga from the storyline. The question, then, becomes how to deal with Tonga in modern times?

Well, in **1968**, the solution was to get a child actress and put her in blackface:

Or, as **Granada** did, you can hire the Guinness record holder of "*world's shortest stuntman*" and, well, **Klingon** him up a bit:

And there are many other attempts, some more successful than others, each potentially problematic:

Sorry about that last one, but it's out there. I don't pretend to have any answer, let alone the right one, for how to deal with The Tonga Issue. But any future producers of adaptations of **The Sign Of The Four** should think long and hard about it before they proceed.

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVANCES:

** I know this is crazy fanboy genre-mixing, but in this book we have a killer who uses a poison that leaves a "*ghastly, inscrutable smile upon [the victims' face] face.*" Further, he "*leave[s] some such record upon the body as a sign that it was not a common murder...bizarre conceits of this kind are common enough in the annals of crime, and usually afford valuable indications as to the criminal.*"

A terribly smile in death? A calling card left with the body?? C'mon, that's the **Joker**, right? It's the **Joker**!!

You have to wonder if **Jerry Robinson** and/or **Bill Finger** and/or **Bob Kane** had this story in mind when the created the **Clown Prince Of Crime**...

** More nerd-cred: I can't hear the name **Jonathon Small** without mentally yelling out "***John Smallberries***!" Yes, I am a pathetic loser.

** As in **A Study in Scarlet**, once again England is personal **Thunderdome** for grievances started in a far-away land It shan't be the last time, though...

** As I predicted in my **A Study in Scarlet** post, Doyle obviously learned from that story and became *much* better at structuring his stories. There's still a considerable amount of off-stage flashback in this story, but this time it's much better integrated into the contemporary story, with revelations coming at a regular pace. Well before the end, we know the killer's identity, and are least partially-clued in as to his motives. So when we get to the capture/confession of **Small**, we still have a flashback digression, but it is a much more manageable *20ish* pages; and as we've already gotten some detail on **Small**, it doesn't seem as much as a non-sequitur. They mystery itself may not be as good, but it's put together much more seamlessly than the first book.

** Given the early information about Holmes' drug use, perhaps we should have been worried when they encountered "*a great pile of **coke** upon the jetty*."

** How old is **Holmes**? In **A Study in Scarlet, Watson** mistakes him for a student when they meet. Here, Inspector **Athelney Jones** refers to **Holmes** as a "*young man*."

Too often the movie and television adaptations opt for an older actor to portray Holmes, but I'm not sure why, as most indications (albeit inconsistent ones) suggest that, at least early in the partnership, Holmes and Watson were much younger than the *stodgy middle-aged* men hired to portray them...

** **Athelney Jones**...*heh heh*...too bad we never saw more of him. Pompous, but entertaining.

** As per usual, **Sherlock Holmes** was *far* ahead of his time, prefiguring psychohistorian **Hari Seldon**: "*...while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician.*"

Obviously Isaac Asimov read the canon. So again, conscious influence on the Foundation novels, or just a coincidence?

** Holmes is very certain of his marksmanship: "*He took out his revolver as he spoke, and, having loaded two of the chambers, he put it back into the right-hand pocket of his jacket.*" Only two rounds, Sherlock?!?

As for Tonga's marksmanship, the novel has his last dart went between Holmes and Watson, hitting one of the launch's hatches. In the **BBC** version, it hit **Watson's** bowler. In **Granada** it hit **Holmes** in the throat--but the heavy scarf he was wearing kept it from doing him damage. Adaptations, man, adaptations...