

The Bilge Pump

Vol. 14, No. 04 April, 2026

*The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the
Barque Lone Star
founded November, 1970*



PLEASE NOTE: **May 05, 2026 Meeting** NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on **May 05** 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 Adventure of the Speckled Band**".

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story.

Our special guest speaker will be our own **Charles Prepolec**, BSI.

IN THIS ISSUE


- | | |
|---|----|
| • "Summary of the April 2026 Meeting," | 03 |
| • "Toast to Mrs. Henry Baker" & "Toast to Mr. & Mrs. Neville St. Clair" by Ira Matesky ,
BSI | 08 |
| • "In Praise of the Pastiche", by David Marcum | 10 |
| • A Comprehensive Look at "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" | 13 |



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

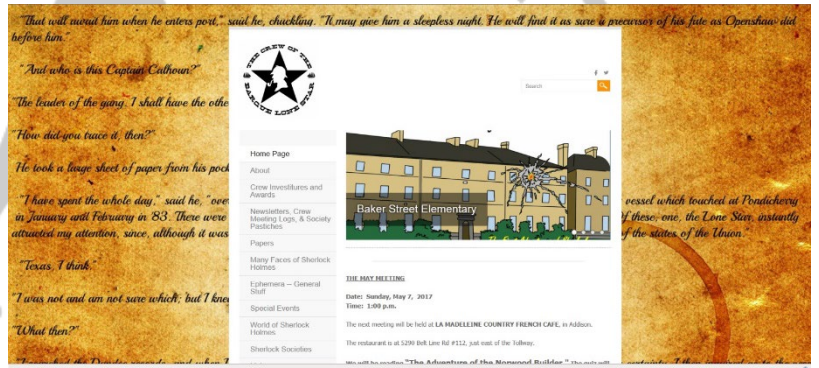
You can follow us on Twitter at: @barquelonestar

You can friend us on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar>

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

Our Website:

www.dfw-sherlock.org



Our Facebook Page:

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

APRIL 05 SUMMARY

There were **57** in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

We started the meeting with a toast by **Ira Matesky, BSI** and the toast was to Mrs. Henry Baker.

We next went to a new agenda item for the Crew. We presented the evidence box for the Blue Carbuncle, developed by **Paul Churchill, BSI** for the Watson's Tin Box Society. The tin box for the Blue Carbuncle might include things like a magnifying glass, forceps, a receipt for the Hotel Cosmopolitan hotel safe, a blue Carbuncle of course, and a note to Sherlock Holmes sent to newspapers in the area. And many more items.

Bob Katz, BSI then led us in a discussion on the Blue Carbuncle by providing leading questions, such as, "why is this a story that begins so well and ends so disappointingly"? Some suggestions were that Sherlock Holmes allows the perpetrator to walk away, and it starts with the suggestion that Christmas is a time of forgiving. And it's disappointing because the innocent plumber was apparently left, sitting in prison. It was suggested that it would be nice to see more of Henry Baker who was an interesting character. Then the question came up as to who gets the £1000 award. It should have gone to Peterson obviously, but we don't know who gets it. We are not convinced that the plumber ever got out of jail. And what does Holmes do with the gem when Peterson leaves his apartment? Does he keep it? Then the next discussion question was, who might the real villain be in this story? Many thought it would be the maid at the Hotel Cosmopolitan.

We then went to announcements: The Crew of the Barque Lone Star is writing a two-volume book set along with the Beacon Society which will be geared for kids. The first will be stories written by children and the second will be written for children. The Beacon Society would also like to develop a kid friendly adaptation of all 60 stories of the Canon. More to come on that.

Olivia Kirkendall noted that the Great Alkaline Plainsmen of Kansas City will have its next meeting April 27th.

John Tiholz will be having a hybrid meeting on Thursday and Bob Katz will be the speaker. This will be for the Upper Valley Sherlock Holmes Club, of Upper Valley New Hampshire. The meeting will be at 5:00 PM Eastern Time.

Brian Wilson noted that the Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa will meet April 23rd.

Ira Matesky noted that the biannual ASH Luncheon will be May 23rd in New York City.

Linda Crohn announced that October 23rd through the 25th there will be a Vincent Starrett Conference to Celebrate the 140th birthday of Vincent Starett. The conference will be held in Chicago and you can find more information by looking on the Internet site And It's Always 1895. IHOSE interviewed John and Linda regarding the Vincent Starett conference and the podcast duo is willing to donate \$1 to the Vincent Starrett fund to maintain his gravesite, for everyone who registers.

Bob Katz is resurrecting a very old scion society called Epilogues of Sherlock Holmes. In 2018 it went on hiatus but he would like to resurrect it now. It will be online and he will discuss two stories in tandem. The first meeting will be May 24th. The two stories will be *A Study in Scarlet* and "His Last Bow".

Robin Rowles noted that the annual Sherlock Holmes weekend in London will be May 21st through the 24th. You can look that up on www.sherlockholmes.uk.

Lauren Cercone said there is a new scion society which will start May 9th in the Northern Delaware area called the Tidewaters of Delaware. This will be an in-person meeting.

Sandy Kozinn gave us two limericks this month. One was on the holiday of Easter and the second on the Blue Carbuncle question of who was really the crook?

Barbara Rusch, BSI, ASH was the featured speaker this month. She spoke on "These Shoes are Killing Me, Common Footwear and History in Popular Culture and in the Sherlockian Canon.

We then had the Canonical Top 10 given by **Brad Keefeaver, BSI**.

Rich Krisciunas, BSI then closed the meeting with a toast to the Crew of the Barque Lone Star.

[Thanks to Cindy for taking the minutes as always.](#)

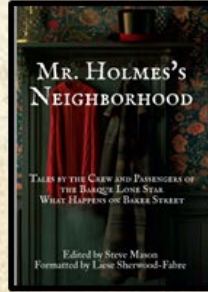
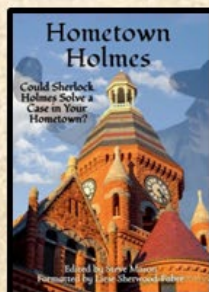
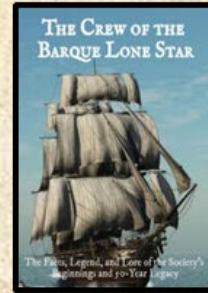
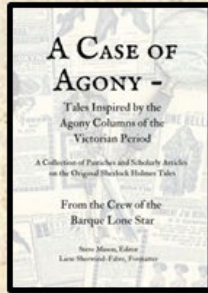
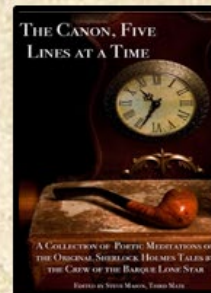


The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society has published 10 wonderful books. Each book is chocked full of wonderful essays and pastiches by our own Society members. You may download a free copy of the books (as .pdf, Nook, or Kindle files) on our website...

<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 11th book in our 56th year of existence, in partnership with The Beacon Society!



The average Sherlockian was first exposed to Sherlock Holmes at the age of 11 years old. The Crew and Beacon Society is producing a two-volume book set to help young readers enjoy Sherlock Holmes.

The 1st volume will be stories, illustrations, poems, etc. authored by younger Sherlockians. The 2nd volume will be authored by adult Sherlockians.

1. Stories should be 3,000 – 5,000 words, which is the average length for a short story. Shorter stories are also welcome.
2. **This is a family book, with minors participating. The target audience is 8-13 year olds, so entries should be age-appropriate.**
3. Your story will be proofread by volunteer editors for grammar, mechanics, and punctuation. No edits will be made to the content of your story.
4. This project is not limited to Crew or Beacon Society members. Any Sherlockian is welcome to participate.
5. The anthology will be finalized by the end of the calendar year, so we ask for entries to be submitted by October 1 to mason.steve8080@gmail.com.
6. All participants will receive a complimentary book as our thanks.

The final product will be published in book form and posted on our websites and shared with all society members as a .pdf, Kindle, and Nook file for free. Physical copies of the books will be sold on the Barnes & Noble along with our other books at cost.



The Torists International S.S. presents

And it is always
1895

*An exploration of the life and work of
Vincent Starrett*



Vincent Starrett, poet, mystery author, journalist, and bibliophile, is best known for his deep passion for detective fiction, especially the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Starrett played a foundational role in the development of Sherlockian scholarship with his 1933 book *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, a cornerstone of Holmesian literature, blending biography, literary criticism, and imaginative speculation about the Great Detective's world. A founding member of The Baker Street Irregulars and a towering figure in the Chicago Sherlockian scene, Starrett's lifelong devotion to Sherlock Holmes continues to influence generations of fans and scholars alike. *And it is Always 1895* will celebrate Starrett's life and work.

Where: Chicago, Illinois | **When:** October 23–24, 2026

Scan the QR code, or visit www.anditalways1895.org to see the list of speakers. Questions? Please email starrett1895@gmail.com.



TOAST TO MRS. HENRY BAKER

Ira Matesky, BSI

*All we know of Mrs. Baker is, the Master tells us that
She no longer loves her husband, for she doesn't brush his hat.
But in spite of this, the man bought, as an offering of peace
And to celebrate the Yule, one of the town-bred Christmas geese.
"For Mrs. Henry Baker," read the card on the bird's feet,
Which helped when Baker's missing goose wound up at Baker Street.
Now I wish we had more knowledge of the lady we could swap,
But that's all that Watson tells us -- I'm afraid that that's the crop.
So, to Mrs. Henry Baker, raise your glass high in the air:
May you never get the brush-off from the one whose life you share!*

TOAST TO MR. & MRS. NEVILLE ST. CLAIR

Ira Matesky, BSI

*For the Crew of the Lone Star, it's my task to toast
A man and his wife whose tale left us engrossed.
Recall when the Master down south took a trip,
And uncovered the Man with the Twisted Lip.*

*Our story begins with Mr. Isa Whitney—
Of his many vices I won't give a litany,
Because, once he's found in the opium den,
He's sent home and never is mentioned again.*

*But an opium den – what is Holmes doing there?
We soon learn that he's searching for Neville St. Clair.
His client is Mrs. St. Clair, of The Cedars
(Holmes spends lots of time there, observe many readers)*

*Holmes fears that St. Clair's been a victim of violence;
He lauds Dr. Watson for his gift of silence.
They travel to Lee, in the County of Kent,
Where Mrs. St. Clair greets them, full of torment.*

*She has but one question: "Oh, where is my Neville?
"Is he still alive, or gone down to the devil?"
Holmes thinks the man's dead – but now here is his letter
--*

*A "galvanized" Holmes declares, now that is much better.
Though the postmark, ironically, comes from
"Gravesend,"*

It is still a good sign: Dead men no letters send!

*The last who was seen with St. Clair was Hugh Boone,
A professional beggar man, not a tycoon.
Neville waved from upstairs; his wife saw his bare throat,
And the only real clue is the coins in his coat.
But St. Clair is still absent, just where none can tell,
So Boone's brought to Bow Street and locked in a cell.*

*Then Holmes says to Bradstreet, "I'll now solve this case
"By applying a sponge to the prisoner's face."
And Neville St. Clair by this means Holmes unmasks;
The man loses face, but he cogently asks,
"Does it take the wit of the Priestess of Delphi
"To see that I've not done away with myself? I
"Say you cannot hold me – I must be released!
"This can't be a murder if I'm the deceased!"*

*But Holmes warns, "you will still pay the wages of sin:
"You'll go home and your wife will ask 'Where have you
been?'
"I don't know where you were, but I know where you
ain't! –
"But I still love you, Neville!" – She must be a saint!*

*And so let us all raise a glass in the air:
To the twisted Hugh Boone, and to Mrs. St. Clair!*

IN PRAISE OF THE PASTICHE

David Marcum

I'll be the first to admit that, while I had heard of author Henry James, I knew very little about him. The first time I went through college, at the normal college age to get a Business Management degree, I took all the general courses that give one a broad base as an enlightened human – literature, the arts, etc. (I was glad to have all under my belt when I went back to college for a second time to get an engineering degree.)

But during that first pass through college, Mr. Henry James was not really covered or even mentioned, as my teachers favored Greek tragedies and then a big jump into Germanic Romanticism. (I still have *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann von Goethe stuck in my head – talk about something I'd like to push out of my brain attic. I even hear the way the teacher pronounced it – *Vair'-ta* – as opposed to the way I wanted to say it – the same way one pronounces the name of that wonderful caramel candy – *Wer-ther*. I can't look at those now without at least saying once in my head *Vair'-ta's Original Caramels*.)

But I digress, which ought to be the real name of this column.

My wife, who has a couple of Master's Degrees, one in English literature – and I know Henry James was an American – doesn't have a high opinion of him. Still, I had heard of him, but barely, and that's all I needed or wanted to know.

But I was reminded of Henry James because of the recent passing of author Dan Simmons. A quick trip to The Goog shows that Simmons was noted for a science fiction series (*The Hyperion Cantos*), some Joe Kurtz mysteries – never heard of them before – and a number of stand-alone novels, including *The Terror* and *Drood* – the latter of which has somewhat tempted me over the years, but never enough to actually read it. (Apparently in his later years, Mr. Simmons was also noted for going off the deep end and alienating a vast chunk of people with his whack political beliefs.)

I've actually only read one of Mr. Simmons books – his massive 600-plus-page Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Fifth Heart*. And his passing reminded of when I read it, back when it was published in 2015 – because in that book, Holmes meets novelist Henry James, and coincidentally there was another vastly superior story – by Daniel D. Victor and also published in 2015 – where Holmes also met James.

I've preached before about how – when playing The Game – one accepts Holmes and Watson as historical figures, and as such, they encounter other historical figures and participate in historical events. Simmons' *The Fifth Heart*, set in the spring of 1893 during the Great Hiatus, follows Holmes as he travels to the United States. He encounters Henry James while doing undercover work for Mycroft. Holmes's investigation into a global anarchistic plot has connections to events that took place several years before amongst a group of people living in Washington, D.C. These people are friends of James, and Holmes recruits him to help with the resolution of what occurred in the past, and also to defeat the current conspiracy.

This book was mildly interesting, although it was far too long, padded a heavily with factoids about life in 1893. (People who were actually living in those times wouldn't have had awkward conversations where they artificially worked in so many mundane items about their contemporary life for the benefit of us, the modern readers. They would have just known about them already and never needed to mention them.) This book presented a different viewpoint of

Holmes and his frantic activities during the Great Hiatus. (Those who think that Holmes just sat around in Tibet for a couple of years contemplating need to read more pastiches. He was a very busy man during that period, racing all over the world.)

My biggest problem with this narrative is the same thing that happens in some other people's pastiches: This author, in trying to be clever, takes noted and established ideas from the Canon and then generates his *own* version of "the truth", when in fact these jarring revelations simply yank one out of the story entirely. I'll never understand why, if someone wants to work so hard to bring another Holmes adventure to the world, he or she can't just do so in the way that has made these stories popular for so long. Instead, the writers find the need to inject their own "inventiveness".

Without revealing any too-obvious spoilers, I can say that most of *The Fifth Heart* is interesting, but I'll be skipping some parts when I re-read it next time. Simmons makes some general mistakes, such as getting the ending of "The Copper Beeches" wrong because he didn't bother to look it up, and he makes up an entirely spurious backstory about Holmes's origins. Simmons also does the same thing with Professor Moriarty that Michael Dibdin did in *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story*, the worst Holmes story ever written, although in this case it's for a more noble purpose. He also has taken a female criminal and her assassin son and incorrectly given her the name of a Canonical character, attempting to tear down the reputation of the latter, and also libelously fictionalizing whole chunks of the book in order to try to create a shocking relationship between the assassin and his supposed father. I'll mark all of this down as "Incorrect."

One must read this book with a grain of salt to be aware of the falsehoods. The best part, for me, was Holmes and James's visit to a certain famed part of a Washington, D.C. cemetery. I've previously had no interest in that area, but now I think that I'll be certain to visit there when I'm next the capital.

Now, having given *The Fifth Heart* a lot more attention than it deserves, as it's not the story I'm recommending this month, I'll now mention the much-better Holmes and Henry James tale: "The Adventure of the Aspen Papers" by Dr. Daniel D. Victor, retired English teacher with a PhD in American Literature. The story was originally published in the very first volume of *The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories* – which went on to be 52 volumes (and over 1,000 stories, along with a lot of associational volumes [and another one coming out this fall], and over \$165,000 in funds raised for the Undershaw school for special needs children at one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's former homes.)

When I conceived the idea of the MX anthology in 2015, I combed the shelves of my Holmes collection in order to identify authors that I respected and wished to participate. I had really enjoyed Dr. Victor's first Holmes novel, *The Seventh Bullet*, back in 1992. (It was later reissued by Titan.) I'd first found it in a bookstore in Baltimore, where I was spending ten weeks in my original career as a U.S. Federal Investigator, temporarily detailed to that area. (Your tax dollars were putting me up in a nice high-rise apartment overlooking the Inner Harbor, and I remember reading and appreciating *The Seventh Bullet* while enjoying the view and wanting to come home.)

For over a decade now, Dr. Victor has been writing a series known as the *Sherlock Holmes and the American Literati* for MX, in which Holmes encounters famous literary figures. For instance, in *The Final Page of Baker Street*, he meets young Raymond Chandler, who serves as one of Holmes's pages. In *Sherlock Holmes and the Baron of Brede Place*, he became involved in the affairs of Stephen Crane. (He's also encountered Jack London and William Gillette and Sinclair Lewis and a number of other American literary legends – some better known than others.) As of this writing, there are twelve volumes in this series– all highly recommended.

When I asked him to write a story for the MX anthology in 2015, Dr. Victor agreed immediately, and soon sent me "The Adventure of the Aspen Papers," in which Henry James visits Baker Street in October 1887 to hire Holmes to locate

a missing friend who is on the trail of a hidden literary trove. Although not labeled as such, this case, featuring a visit from the American Henry James, is clearly a part of Dr. Victor's ongoing *American Literati* series. I enjoyed this one very much. Though it's a short story, it's miles ahead of Simmons much larger and clunkier novel – and it gives both an interesting case for Holmes and Watson, and also a quick thumbnail portrait of Henry James.

("The Aspen Papers" is still available in the first volume of the MX anthology, and it was also republished in Dr. Victor's short-story collection, *The Literary Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.)

Overall, I much prefer Dr. Victor's tale of Henry James and Sherlock Holmes over Simmons', but both serve as interesting companion pieces. Read them both and decide for yourself!



[I'll confess: A version of this essay originally appeared on my irregular blog "A Seventeen Step Program" – It was just the second entry ever written! – on August 8th, 2015, and it was reworked upon learning of the recent death of Dan Simmons.]

<https://17stepprogram.blogspot.com/2015/08/sherlock-holmes-meets-henry-james-two.html>

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT “THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND”

1. Summary (The Diogenes Club)

Dr. Roylott practiced medicine in India where he met and married the widow of Major General Stoner. Roylott had a violent temper and beat a servant to death. This forced his return to England and to Stoke Moran, his ancestral home. The estate was mortgaged to the hilt and the doctor was broke. His wife had an inheritance from her first husband which allowed the family to live comfortably.

Mrs. Stoner/Roylott was killed in a train accident but under her will, Dr. Roylott continued to receive the inheritance as long as the girls lived with him. Roylott’s violent temper alienated the entire village and the girls lived in almost complete isolation except for occasional brief visits to Mrs. Westphail. On one of these visits Julia met and became engaged to an army officer. Shortly thereafter she died quite suddenly and unexpectedly during the night. She said something about a “speckled band” to Helen as she expired.

Helen became engaged to an old suitor and Dr. Roylott asked her to occupy Julia’s old room. Helen heard a low whistle during the night and Julia had heard the same thing for several nights before her death. Helen consulted Holmes.

The "speckled band" was a swamp adder which Roylott introduced into the bedroom from an adjacent chamber via a ventilator and a fake bell rope. Holmes visits the rooms and waits during the night. When he hears noises, he beats the bell rope with the adder on it. The injured and enraged adder retreats into Roylott’s room, bites and kills him.

2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo’s Camp)

- First published in:
The Strand Magazine, February 1892
- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
Early April 1883, given.
- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
Holmes & Watson sharing Baker Street quarters..
- Opening scene:
At 221B. Watson awakened early by Holmes. Client visited early, with no appointment.
- Client:
Helen Stoner, stepdaughter of Dr. Grimsby Roylott. She had restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature gray, and her expression was weary and haggard.
- Crime, suspicion, concern:
Stepfather acted strangely, client felt concerned for her safety. Julia her twin sister had died mysteriously 2 yrs previously. The client feared murder. It was determined later that Julia was murdered by a snake (speckled band) bite, Helen’s murder was attempted but did not succeed.
- Villain:
Stepfather, Dr. Grimsby Roylott of Stoke Moran. Murder, attempted murder.
- Motive:
Money. Roylott needs to prevent step-daughter’s marriage to maintain control of wife’s capitol.

- Logic / clues used to solve:
Cigar smoke was smelled by victim through ventilator, fake bell-pull, bed fastened to floor. Fake building repairs forced Helen to move into Julia's old room. Saucer of milk on safe, looped whipcord. Financial arrangements (see motive above).
- Policemen:
None
- Holmes' fees:
Client stated "in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful". Holmes replied "I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best".
- Transport:
Client took dog-cart from home, first train from Leatherhead to Waterloo (station). Holmes & Watson then took a cab to Waterloo, the train to Leatherhead, and a trap back 4 or 5 miles through the Surrey lanes to Stoke Moran.
- Food:
Holmes ordered a cup of hot coffee for Ms. Stoner on the cold morning. Mrs. Hudson had lit the fire.
- Drink/vices:
None.
- Other cases mentioned:
The case of Mrs. Fairintosh, involving her sore need related to an opal tiara
- Notable Quotables:
Holmes: "Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up."
Holmes: "I cannot think.", Watson: "I cannot imagine."

Roylott: "You are Holmes the meddler. You are Holmes the busybody! You are Holmes the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!"
Holmes: "An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument."
- Other interestings:
"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"
Holmes addresses client (incorrectly) as Miss Roylott while at Baker St., then later at Stoke Moran calls her Miss Stoner.

3. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	April, 1883
b.	William Baring-Gould	April, 1883
c.	H.W. Bell	April, 1883
d.	Roger Butters	April, 1883
e.	Jay Finley Christ	Wednesday, April 4, 1883
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Wednesday, April 4, 1883
g.	D. Martin Dakin	Wednesday, April 4, 1883
h.	Bill Dorn	Friday, April 6, 1883
i.	Henry Folsom	April, 1883
j.	John Hall	April, 1883
k.	Craig Janasek	Friday, April 6, 1883
l.	Brad Keefauver	Sunday, April 1, 1883
m.	Toshio Suzuki	April, 1883
n.	June Thomson	April, 1883
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	Wednesday, April 4, 1883

4. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- How many singular features were there in this adventure?
- To whom was the pledge given?
- What rumors would make the matter even worse than the truth?
- Was Watson an early riser?
- Was Watson suggesting a 'fire' significant?
- Did Watson wash or shave that morning?
- Where (see MAZA) were the bedrooms?
- Was the coffee ever served?
- Was Holmes's first observation correct?
- What does the return ticket in the glove imply?
- Was there a difference between men's and women's reactions to Holmes's initial inferences?
- Can an opal tiara relate to sore need?
- Did Mrs. Farintosh reward Holmes munificently?
- Why did Holmes recognize the Royslott name?
- Were the twins identical?
- Is there any historical record of the Crewe accident?
- Are the Royslott gypsy wanderings incongruous?
- Are sleep whistlers aware of their whistling?
- Could a baboon or cheetah open an unlocked door?
- Wouldn't liquid (brandy) asphyxiate an unconscious person?
-

- What most important business could bring Roylott to London?
- What theories allow for Roylott following Helen Stoner?
- Can bent steel be straightened readily?
- Was blue paper significant?
- Why a toothbrush, but no razor?
- How did Holmes tap Watson's shoulder while sitting in the front of the trap?
- Was Roylott awake in the dark during those four hours?
- How does a snake climb a free-hanging rope?
- When did Holmes and Watson retrieve their shoes?
- Was there a reason to knock twice on Roylott's door?
- Why did Roylott die so quickly?
- In light of the law at the time allowing a husband control of his wife's money, were the murders necessary?

17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. Dr. Roylott, Medicine Man

Upon getting his medical degree, Grimesby Roylott seems to have immediately left the country to seek his fortune, going to Calcutta, where we are told "by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice."

We've heard of Englishmen leaving the country to go to war, to hunt for gold, to find a bride, but to establish a medical practice? Was there money to be made as a doctor in India? Or was this career direction a direct reflection of Roylott's medical skills?

2. Eight Years Working On His Detective Degree

Once again in SPEC, we get a reference to Watson as Holmes's student, with mention of his notes and studying Holmes's methods. But what was Watson's goal in these studies? Did the doctor have hopes of becoming a detective himself, the first franchise of the Holmes consulting detective agency? Or might the doctor have had some other plan in his studies, other than the prose results that finally came of them?

3. How Terrible Can Terrible Be?

Watson writes, "I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth." What could be more terrible than a backfired attempt to kill one's step-daughter with a deadly viper? Do these terrible rumors have anything to do with the death of that step-daughter, which apparently freed Watson from his promise of secrecy? Was the local gossip pointing fingers Violet's way? And how would Watson know of rumors in Surrey?

4. The Disposition Of The Ancestral Home

The Roylotts, one of the oldest Saxon families in England, held on to Stoke Moran right up to the last gasp of their boy Grimesby. But what then? Would the estate go to Grimesby's step-daughter? And after her apparent death, what then? To her husband? Her child, if she died in childbirth?

5. Grimesby's Love Interest?

Despite all the other odd parts of life with a bad-tempered step-father, the Stoner girls were allowed short visits to their mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail. Might this indicate a certain fondness on the part of Grimesby for his wife's sister? It wouldn't be the first occasion in those days, that a man took an interest in the sister of his late wife. And would this tend to show that Grimesby married Mrs. Stoner for love rather than money?

6. The Vanishing Half-Pay Major

You've met a wonderful person. You become engaged. Two weeks before your wedding day, your lover drops dead of "fright." What do you do? What can you do? Is it expected that Julia Stoner's fiancé should drop quietly off the map, or is this another crime we can lay at the feet of Grimesby Roylott?

7. Hand Me A Mint Julep, Grimesby!

Though Stoke Moran is described as an old house and a few acres of land, we later get a reference to "those wretched

gypsies in the plantation.” Is this use of the word the same as we’ve come to expect of the plantations of India or the Southern U.S.? Could one have a plantation on “a few acres”?

8. Gather The Torches And Storm The Manor!

As if there weren’t enough horror overtones in this tale, we get echoes of Frankenstein in the words, “he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.” Why would the locals tolerate free-roaming dangerous animals?

Could Grimesby hope to keep a cheetah fenced in on a country estate? How long would it be before one of Grimesby’s monsters found a little girl picking flowers by a nearby pond?

9. Helen Stoner’s Nocturnal Emissions

“I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?” Helen’s sister Julia asks her. Snoring, we know; talking in one’s sleep, most of us have run into; but sleep-whistling? Does such a thing exist?

10. No Wonder They Went To Harrow For Christmas

Apparently that old Scrooge Grimesby didn’t want his girls to get visited by any man, even old St. Nick, as Julia’s “chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples.” How effective was this sort of chimney-barring and against what? Burglars, certainly, but would four staples in a wide chimney stop squirrels, birds, or other ordinary chimney pests?

11. A Bit More Dainty Than Dark Glasses

We are treated to the nearly racy passage “Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor’s knee” just before we are shocked by the exposure of Roylott’s abuse. How would black lace fringe a lady’s hand in that period? From the sleeve or the gloves? A handkerchief up the sleeve perhaps?

12. How Big Was The Big Guy?

“So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway . . .” we are told of Grimesby Roylott. Any estimates of the size of top hats and door cross bars, so that we can calculate the height of this brute?

13. The Right Tools For The Job

“An Eley’s No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need.”

Two questions: First, does the famous “Eley’s No. 2” have the stopping power to argue with a raging giant like good ol’ Grim? And second, Watson’s got a gun, Holmes has a toothbrush. What are the offensive capabilities of a toothbrush in the hands of a creative sort like Holmes?

14. His Own Interior Decorator

Behold the lair of the beast: “Dr. Grimesby Roylott’s chamber was larger than that of his stepdaughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye.”

What deductions can we make of Roylott from his room and its furnishings? What branch of technical was “technical”? Why the camp-bed for such a large fellow? Where did his wife sleep before her death?

15. How Good Is A Bad Doctor?

Holmes tells Watson, “When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession.” Is Holmes right? Were Palmer and Pritchard successful doctors, so much so they could be considered at the head of their profession? Are there any other examples in the history of crime of good doctors who were good criminals?

16. But What About The Cat Whip And The Monkey Whip?

Holmes finds a “dog whip” in Roylott’s room. The modern reader might first think that this is an accessory for the ever-popular dog-cart, but is it really? Or is this an actual whip for use on man’s best friend, something fairly unthinkable in the modern era? Why single out dogs for the small whip, when hogs, goats, and other animals closer at hand than cart-to-horse range were equally controllable by the same size of whip?

17. Assassination Schools Of The Far East?

“The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training.”

We know Roylott had experience in the East, but wasn't his medical training all back in Britain? What training did he receive in India?

5. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

This is Sherlock Holmes at his best! He is kind and considerate to his client, poised and cool in the presence of the villain, and absolutely courageous in the face of danger. And what a danger! The awareness of it slithers in upon our minds: “A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?” Yes, it certainly does strike us! Even those who cannot remember the story's title always remember “the one with the snake.” Is there any wonder that this story consistently ranks at the top of every list of Sherlockian favorites? In a moment: The scent of cigar smoke leads the Hounds to solve the mysteries of “The Speckled Band!”

A very amiable person: That Grimesby Roylott is quite a character, isn't he? He killed a man and served hard time for it. He abused his stepdaughters physically, and possibly sexually as well. We never doubt that he killed Julia Stoner, even if at first we don't know how he managed it. His neighbors hated and feared him. And he seems to have been on the Canonical Worst Dressed List too!

What do you make of Roylott's association with the gypsies? Did he let them camp on his land just because it annoyed the neighbors? Did he plan to blame his second murder upon them? (Not a bad idea: Even Sherlock Holmes had the gypsies on his mind until he saw the details of the murder room.) Or did Roylott long for the gypsy life, a life without land to manage and a household to maintain?

We cannot deny that the murder of Julia Stoner was cleverly done. Even had the local coroner noticed the marks of the serpent's fangs on the victim, Roylott could have simply blamed the snake and destroyed it with many a crocodile tear about how it got away from him and just happened to bite his stepdaughter.

The murder method worked so well that Roylott tried it again, but it baffles me that he should have done so immediately after Helen Stoner had been to see a detective. Did Roylott not realize how much his stepdaughter had seen and heard on the night of her sister's death? Did he underestimate Sherlock Holmes? And why did Roylott come into town that day? Did he lie to Helen about his important business, just so that he could see what she did in his absence? Why did he decide to barge in upon Holmes and threaten him? Did he really think that intimidation was the best way to prevent interference? Was he past thinking? Was his visit a subconscious wish to be caught and prevented from committing another crime?

A thousand details: The swamp adder's bite killed Roylott in ten seconds, but Julia Stoner lingered on long enough to stagger out of her room and talk to her sister for a moment. How do you explain the time difference? Different reaction times on different victims? Different snakes? Would Helen Stoner really have been happy in her marriage to Percy Armitage, a man too thick-headed to recognize that she was in danger from her stepfather? Do you think she ever did marry Percy, once she didn't need him as her means of escape from her intolerable life at Stoke Moran?

Why does Holmes call Helen Stoner “Miss Roylott?” (See Doubleday, page 263: I believe that the name switch does not occur in all editions of the story.) Was it an accidental slip, or an intentional goad? If the latter, what did Holmes hope to learn from it?

Most modern readers cannot help but take note of the many sexual symbols in this story. And yet many of you who have been Sherlockians since childhood undoubtedly read the story for the first time without thinking of anything but literal snakes and pokers. Do you think that we enjoy the story more or less when we have some knowledge of its Freudian undertones?

6. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

Much has been written about the sexual elements in this tale, ranging from the supposedly phallic snake to the suggestive juxtaposition of the stepfather and his nubile daughters.

It is the business of Sherlock Holmes to reveal the secrets of rapacity and murder; is it his business also to make improper sexual behaviour known?

7. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

The ancient Manor House of Stoke Moran, dark and crumbling from age, stands forbidding against the backdrop of huge trees and heath-covered moor. Outside, it is night. Gypsies roam the moor, and a cheetah and baboon prowl about the premises as a deterrent to unwelcome intruders. Inside, twin sisters sleep in their separate bedrooms in a household dominated by a violent stepfather.

A scream cuts the dark. One sister runs out into the hallway to find her twin staggering from her room, incoherently raving about a "speckled band." Although the stepfather, a physician, is on the scene almost immediately, nothing can be done and the woman slowly sinks and dies. A coroner's inquiry reaches a verdict of death from unknown causes. The surviving sister is moved into her dead twin's room so that repairs to Stoke Moran can be made. It is not long before she begins hearing again the strange noises that played a prelude to the terrible fate of her sister. Frightened and brutalized by her stepfather, she seeks Holmes' assistance.

A little while ago, there was some dispute over what a snake can and cannot do. I stated, for example, that a snake does not drink milk, but another Hound said that the snake-charmers in India keep a bowl of milk handy when entertaining tourists with their dangerous pets. But there are other herpetological characteristics mentioned in SPEC, one of which is a continual hissing sound like that made by a tea-kettle. Does a snake hiss continuously and is the sound as loud as that of a tea-kettle?

Holmes tells Watson, "that and a toothbrush are, I think, all that we shall need" when the two prepare to visit Stoke Moran. They checked into a local hostelry without any baggage; the good innkeeper must have looked askance at that. Holmes knew that they'd be all night, but made no provision for fresh linen, shaving...nothing but a toothbrush (which, hopefully, Watson didn't have to share with him). Why was Holmes in such a rush to dash out of 221B unprepared for an overnight stay?

After Dr. Roylott has met his grisly fate, Holmes recounts the sequence of his impressions and deductions to Watson. In the course of this, Holmes says, "It would be a sharp-eyed coroner indeed who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where the poison fangs had done their work." This strikes me as a curious statement. In cases of snake bite, the puncture area invariably becomes reddish in colour and swells noticeably. For those who would say, "It was probably at the hairline or some other location where the wounds could not be easily discerned," I ask, how did Dr. Roylott know where the snake would bite its victim? The marks of the bite might easily have occurred in a location easily seen by a coroner or anyone else.

In order to retrieve his dangerous pet, Roylott stood on a chair by the ventilator and used a dog whip with its end tied in a noose to handle the creature, presumably both when he sent it on its deadly mission and when it returned. How did he know the snake would always return through the ventilator? Snakes cannot hear a whistle, and in any case are incapable of being trained. What would have prevented the creature from wandering about the death chamber and being detected by those investigating Julia Stoner's death? Further, Roylott knew that the snake needed to be handled with the utmost care. Why, then, did he have the chair positioned so close to the ventilator that the snake was able to bite him? Arm's length with the dog whip would have been the order of the day, one would think.

And, for the physiologists among us, how much strength would Holmes have needed to straighten, with a single jerk, the steel fireplace poker bent by Roylott? A distant remembrance from a physics class recalls that such a feat would require far more vigour than that needed to bend the poker in the first place.

8. 56 Stories in 56 Days (Charlotte Anne Walters)

This is a funny one really because though I enjoyed re-reading the story very much, I can't really think of much to say about it, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

I suppose there is lots to say about the stories I love and plenty to get off my chest about those I don't like, but this one comes somewhere in the middle. Plus, it's wages day today at work and I've been staring at a spread-sheet all day so my brain feels too stuck in the 21st century to really loose itself in the 19th. That's one of the things that made writing my Holmes novel difficult, switching between two eras when my job firmly places me in the modern world of prestige-cosmetics recruitment, a million miles from Victorian London. Some weekends I'd be sitting there writing about foggy cobbled streets with hansom cabs rattling along, then I'd get a phone call about epic staffing disasters on the YSL counter in Selfridges and be pulled abruptly back into the 21st century. Sometimes it was hard to make my way back.

So what can I say about the Speckled Band? It certainly draws you in and all seems very plausible at the time, but when you think about it afterwards, some things do seem unrealistic. Holmes was very lucky not to have been bitten by the snake (the speckled band) as he thrashed it with his stick and I doubt you can train a snake to return to you with a whistle and the promise of a saucer of milk. Also, could someone really have kept a baboon and a cheetah strolling around their gardens?

But, as I say, this doesn't distract from the enjoyment as you read the story. It is one of the only short stories where I have found myself working things out ahead of Watson but it still kept me gripped all the way home on the train, I nearly missed my stop

because I was so lost in the tale of poor Miss Stoner and her evil step-father. Conan Doyle clearly has little regard for step-fathers as they are generally portrayed as eager to get their hands on their charge's money by any means.

In this case, by sending a poisonous snake into Miss Stoner's room at night then calling it back with the aforementioned whistle and milk.

Once again Holmes seems to genuinely care about his client and it is interesting to read the stories back like this and see the kindness and sensitivity Holmes was capable of. He is also quite protective of Watson in this story, pointing out the danger they will face and thanking him for agreeing to spend the night with him in the room where the first snake-victim met their end. When they cross the grounds to the house and encounter the baboon, Holmes grabs Watson's wrist to stop him walking on further. He is also careful to position Watson in a chair away from the bed whilst Holmes himself sits on the bed next to the rope which the snake will descend.

Enjoyable and diverting, but a little unrealistic – 6 out of 10.

9. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

Holmes' First Bond Villain!

There is something that I like to call the **Twilight Zone Phenomenon**.

There reaches a point when, through overexposure, an audience begins to lose touch with what a story actually does or says, and seems content to distill it down to a one or two sentence summary, letting all the subtleties and meanings of the work vanish into a jaded, post-ironic ether.

Take the **Twilight Zone**, for example. We've seen all of those episodes, especially the "classic" ones, dozens of times. We've seen parodies and pastiches (and out-and-out stealing) of their ideas by television and movies and comics (not that **Serling** and company were above **ahem** borrowing an idea from other sources). At times, it seems as if we've become jaded to the original stories, and are unable to engage with them on any level except the *tagline* and the *twist*. "Oh, that's the one where **William Shatner** sees the monster on the plane wing!" or "The one where **Burgess Meredith** breaks his glasses!" or "The planet where everyone is ugly!" To heck with any of the themes of the cautionary tales, the nuances, the details--what they're *really* about. The modern audience just wants it boiled down to "*It's a cookbook!*"

Which brings me to **The Adventure Of The Speckled Band**, or as many people--who look puzzled initially when I begin to describe the story--exclaim, "*oh, the one with the snake!!*"

Yes, the one with the snake. *Sigh*.

Speckled Band, along with **The Red-Headed League** and **Silver Blaze**, is one of the most reprinted of the **Holmes** short stories. It even appears quite often in English textbooks. It has been adapted to stage and screen more often than any of the other short stories (by my unofficial, doubtless incomplete count).

Arthur Conan Doyle himself declared it his favorite story, and produced a very successful and long-running play based on the story.

And there is a *tremendous* amount of stuff going on in this story. Start with the fact that it is Sherlock Holmes' first locked room murder mystery. Add in the fact that you have a marvelous villain--who'd make a great Bond Villain--who comes up with a overwrought scheme worthy of a **Columbo** killer.

Beautiful twin sisters threatened by "gipsies" and exotic foreign animals make this a wonderful bit of Gothic melodrama.

Add in some interesting thematic nuggets--musings about the plight of a declining aristocracy, thoughts about the financial (and physical) plight of women in Victorian England, and a symbolic acknowledgement of the fear many felt about the cultural influences from Britain's empire that were beginning to seep back to the home country.

And all anyone wants to talk about is the ****ed snake. *Sigh*.

Don't get me wrong--the snake is cool and all--but come on, people, there's much, much more to this story than "the twist."

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVANCES:

** **Doctor Grimesby Roylott of Stoke Moran** is a tremendously wonderful name for a villain, isn't it? And it's not just the name--Doyle gives him a creepy physical presence.

So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin, fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

He also dresses distinctively: "*His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand.*" He has immense physical strength, and a violent temper. Yet he is also cunning and devious. Throw in a menagerie of exotic creatures--a cheetah! A baboon! Poisonous snakes!--and Grimesby Roylott is only one symbolic physical infirmity or affected foreign accent from being a James Bond villain!

Yet, for all his fiendish cleverness, his murder plan is a little *much*, isn't it? For it to work, he has to bolt **Julia's** bed to the floor, install a fake bell-pull rope in her room, and install an unnecessary ventilator between his room and hers--all very soon prior to the murder! And don't forget the long weeks (months?) it would have taken to train the snake. That's an investment of time a Columbo villain might hesitate to make.

That's an awful lot of work, and it still requires us to believe that the local coroner was not particularly curious about odd coincidences.

And then he contrives to move **Helen** into Julia's old room, and have her die *in exactly the same way*? How can he expect to get away with that? Even the most Barney Fifish of local constabulary would have to declare that to be too much coincidence, and lead to a much more intense investigation.

This indicates, to me, that cunning has slid into madness (if he wasn't already there, having beaten a "*native butler*" to death in a fit of rage).

And given that local doctors couldn't identify the poison, or even find the fang marks on Julia's body, I'm not sure he needed to go too all that trouble. Just milk some poison from the adder, and surreptitiously jab her with a hypodermic (he *was* a doctor, after all). Or ****, just let the snake bite her right out in the open; if the "slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet" for Roylott's death, it's unlikely they would call a similar accident murder if it happened to Helen instead.

** Holmes opines. "*When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge.*"

Hence, **Doctor Doom, Dr. Phibes, Doctor Polaris, Doctor Demonicus, Dr. Shrinker, Dr. Evil**, etc.

** Roylott and Holmes have one of the most glorious exchanges, all in favor of Holmes, as the detective is able to goad the evil doctor by smiling and ignoring him.

My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes, the busybody!"

His smile broadened. "Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!"

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."

** This is the *second* Holmes story in which a young woman's evil step-father is willing to go to extreme lengths to keep her from marrying, so he may maintain control of her money. And unlike **A Case Of Identity**, this time it's murder, not just pretend-incest.

I'm no economic/sociology scholar, but surely Doyle intended this as something of a statement about the plight of single women in Victorian times. He was famously anti-women's suffrage, but we shouldn't allow that one political stand to paint him as *totally* misogynist; he also campaigned hard for reform of England's draconian divorce laws, which was viewed as being pro-women's rights, and for other social reforms supported by feminists of the era.

Certainly the recurrence of this story in his work--the young woman forced to choose between living at home and effectively surrendering her inheritance to uncaring "family," with the only exit a marriage that would be challenged by humiliation of death--shows he had some awareness and concern over the difficulties faced by single women in society, their access to family money and their ability to support themselves.

Perhaps the best lesson we can draw is, if you're leaving a young female relative a sizable bequest, don't attach conditions about marriage or the such on it. Just give her the **** money.

The other lesson: Step-fathers are *evil b*****ds*..

** When Helen Stoner describes the history and slow decline of the Roylott clan, I'm sure many a reader gave an unsympathetic chuckle at "*[t]he last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper.*" Aww, poor rich people!

But of course, England was undergoing massive economic and social changes, and the decline of the landed gentry was a serious issue--perhaps not because they would turn to murder, as this story suggests, but because the economic support systems of whole regions was vanishing, without anything to replace them. Yeah, the Roylott's problems might not induce a tear, but the many

servants and tradesmen and shopkeepers who depended on their money were no out of luck, too. Take **Watson's** description of the manor, "In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin." No one benefited from something like that, and the collapse of the Roylott's doubtless meant a lot of other people had to leave for the not-really-great conditions in the cities or mine to earn a living.

At least give Grimesby Roylott credit, for he tried to break out of the cycle. He took a loan from a relative, got an education, and took up an important (and lucrative) trade. Unfortunately, his (hereditary, perhaps, reading his family history) madness caught up with him. But at in the beginning, he *tried* to save his family.

** A cheetah and a baboon? Oh, you eccentric Britishers and your wacky pets.

Surprisingly enough, the **1964 BBC** version actually had a *real* cheetah and baboon, proving that not every show of the era suffered from **Doctor Who**-like production budgets.

The **Grenada** adaptation apparently couldn't get their hands on a cheetah, so they *changed* it to a leopard. *Growwllll!*

If you're of a particularly literary bent, you *might* interpret these exotic, foreign animals and the fear they cause as symbolic for the unease caused by the growing cultural influence of Britain's holdings on the homelands. And the fact that they weren't truly the evil at work here a symbolic rejection of those fears.

Or perhaps, sometime a cheetah (*or leopard*) and a baboon are just a cheetah (*or leopard*) and a baboon...

** In the BBC '64 version, there is *definitely* some attraction/flirtation going on between Watson and Helen Stoner.

No problem there on Watson's part; in the original writings, this takes place while he's still a bachelor, and in the TV series he was never married. But Miss Stoner is engaged at this point!!

Yet she is not *too* enchanted with her fiancé, **Percy Armitage**. She complains that he's not too supportive of her worries: "even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes."

We have to wonder if, now that she no longer had to marry to get away from Roylott, she followed through on marrying **Mr. "You're Just A Scared Female."**

** Given Roylott's violence and cunning, many commentators have been suspicious of the death of the Stoners' mother: "*Shortly after our return to England my mother died--she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe.*" Could her death have been staged, as well? Could she have been murdered by Grimesby, so he could access her money?

There's no real evidence either way. But perhaps the greater question is why people aren't more suspicious about the untimely death of Helen Stoner. At the beginning of the tale, Watson tells us that he is released from his pledge not to tell the story because of "*the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given.*" Given the troubling family history here, perhaps we should be questioning the surprising death of the sole survivor a mere nine years after the events of Speckled Band. I can't help but suspect foul play might be involved...

** Watson also says the he has decided to tell the tale because "*there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.*" Really, Doctor? Rumours that are *worse* than "Roylott murdered one step-daughter with a snake and tried to kill the other one the same way"? Unless the locals are starting rumours about Satanic ceremonies and unholy relations between Roylott and the baboon, I have trouble conceiving of rumours which *could* more terrible than the truth.

** Doyle once again skimps a bit at the ending, depriving us a bit of the closure we desire.

It is not necessary that I should prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet.

No, Sir Arthur, that is exactly the kind of thing we *do* want to hear.

** If I were in a particularly *conspiratorial* state of mind, I would note that with Julia dying unmarried, and Grimesby declared dead 'by accident,' Helen now controls the *entire* £750 annual income. Perhaps a reread looking at the story from this angle might reveal that Holmes and Watson were duped by a clever and cunning murderer...?

Naaahhhh...

** Watson writes that Holmes "work[ed] as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth..." Holmes himself tells Miss Stoner that, "As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best." This seems to once again belie the notion of Holmes being greedy. It certainly makes **Granada's conceit that Holmes kept the Blue Carbuncle** seem baseless.

** The Granada version decided for some reason that the Stoners were *not* twins--Julia was 5 years older than Helen. Go figure...?

** Only 1 prior case specifically mentioned this time, and it comes from Miss Stoner and Holmes, not Watson--the case of **Mrs. Farintosh**, which "*concerned an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson.*"

** The "*gipsies*" were a pretty effective red herring, and Doyle went so far as to have Holmes latch onto them as suspects at

the outset. Given Doyle's prior proclivities for making foreign groups and outsiders responsible for many crimes, the reader begins to make that leap as well. Well played, Sir.

** Maybe it's just me, but could *anyone* possibly go 2 plus without realizing the bell-pull was a dummy? Even if you "never" used it, wouldn't you at some point test it, just to see if it worked? Just because it was there? How could you resist? I know I couldn't. Is it a guy thing? Or just a *me* thing?

** There have probably been more pages written debating what kind of snake appears in this story than there have been debating the Kennedy assassination.

A slight exaggeration, but only slight. **The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes** has a 3-page chart examining all the snake species that have been suggested as possibilities, explaining how they fit Watson's description and how they don't, with references to no fewer than **12** articles by Holmesian scholars on the subject. One gentleman goes so far as to suggest a hybrid between a Mexican Gila monster and an Indian cobra as the likely culprit.

Just stop. It's a piece of fiction. It's a snake. Suspend disbelief, move on, and enjoy the story, please.

** Final lesson: If you have time for dying words, please *avoid fancy metaphors*. "Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!" is nice and all, but in that *same* amount of time you could have said, "I was bitten by a darn snake! Here's the wound!" And Roylott would have been in jail long ago.

So don't get cute with your dying words, is what I'm saying.

