



2008

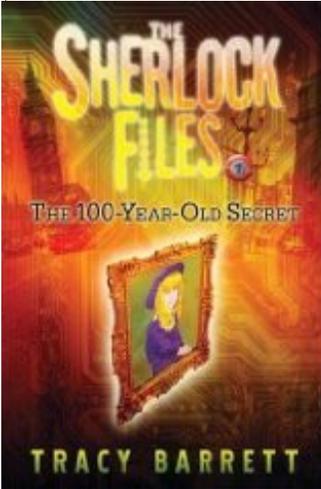
# Communication No. 282

The Pleasant Places of Florida

Vol. 12 No.4

## From the Papers on the Sundial:

**We hope you had a fine summer. Enjoy this latest addition to the Communications!**



### The Sherlock Files: The 100-Year-Old Secret

*Type of material:* Hardcover book *Publisher:* Henry Holt and Company, New York *Year:* 2008 *Author:* Tracy Barrett

This is the first book in a new series for children by a professor from Vanderbilt University. As several efforts at Sherlockian children's series have appeared lately, this will have to be something special to make a

splash among Sherlockians. I think I can safely say it meets the criteria. Other recent series have attempted to appeal to adults as well as young persons. This one is written for sub-teens and remains faithful to its proposed audience. As an adult, I found it interesting, but lacking in emotional content, a not uncommon occurrence in Sherlockian tales, but here, the omission was intended. The author carefully maintains the viewpoint of a young lady from a proper family. There is no 'darker side' and no social significance, only a pair of children having an adventure.

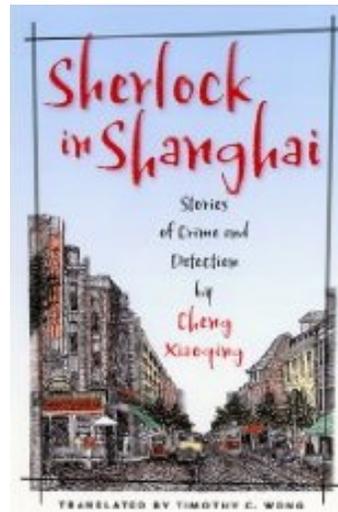
The children involved, Xena and Xander Holmes, are American offspring of the Holmes clan whose family have moved to London as part of their father's work. Common UK institutions are viewed with all the wonder expected of bright but un-travelled American children and their observations are vivid. I was particularly won over by Xander's refusal to refer to Soccer as 'Football.' As descendants of Sherlock Holmes, they fall heir to several items; "the Game" as played by their father and his father, membership in an odd Society and ownership of a worn volume titled "SH Cases: Unresolved."

The mystery in this tale is one that Sherlock had to abandon and it is dealt with in the same fashion as the siblings face a new Country, a new School and new friends. Its solution escaped their ancestor but is avail-

able to them precisely because they are just what they are - bright, inquisitive young people with a somewhat different slant on life and a lack of experience in the peculiar world they find themselves inhabiting. This view and their own self-confidence allow them to ask questions others overlook and to see solutions that eluded people more familiar with the context of the problem.

There are also several themes begun in the book, which may or may not be continued in later books in the series. In any case, these leave room for expansion and a variety of types of later adventures. I think the intended audience will appreciate the book and any more in the series and I also think they will be encouraged to inquire more deeply into the Canon. For adults, it can be an amusing read.

*Reviewed by:* Philip K. Jones; May, 2008.



### Sherlock in Shanghai

*Type of material:* Trade Paperback *Publisher:* University of Hawai'i Press *Year:* 2007 *Author:* Cheng, Xiaoqing, as translated by Timothy C. Wong *Price:* \$24.00

This is a collection of translated tales by a very popular Chinese writer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This selection of tales is, I presume, representative, but the translator makes it clear that it is only a small

fraction of the work available. The characters of Huo Sang and Bao Lang will be very familiar to Sherlockians. They fit together very much like Holmes and Watson and their world is very similar to the Gaslight era of 1895. The feats of reasoning by Huo Sang leave his partner just as amazed as the good doctor until they are explained and the same air of wonder pervades Bao Lang's recounting of his partner's adventures.

Cheng Xiaoqing wrote for the popular Chinese Press from 1915 until the Communist Revolution in 1949. Besides almost singlehandedly introducing modern detective fiction to Chinese Literature, he was a major collaborator in the translation projects that made Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's works available (cont. on page 2)



(cont. from page 1) in Classical and modern vernacular Chinese along with those of Maurice Leblanc, Earl Derr Biggers, Leslie Charteris and S. S. Van Dine.

Cheng's stories were mostly centered on Huo Sang and his biographer/partner, Bao Lang. This pair were clearly a Shanghai version of Holmes and Watson with a comfortable bachelor household, a devoted housekeeper and a circle of eager policemen looking for their help. There was even an expert criminal opponent, The South-China Swallow, a master thief along the lines of Leblanc's Arsène Lupin. In 1945, a 'complete' pocket book version of the Huo Sang tales was published which comprised some 30 volumes, although the murky publishing history of his efforts makes the 'complete' tag questionable.

In addition to his writing, Cheng Xiaoqing taught at the High School attached to Soochow University for most of his life. After the Communist take-over, the market for 'frivolous' fiction disappeared and his literary efforts were confined to a few adventure stories and classical-style poetry. It is most ironic that his work was in official disfavor with all three governments under which he wrote.

To the Kuomintang Literary World, his work was part of the "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" literature, works of no social significance or value. True Literature was supposed to instruct the reader in ways to improve society and move it away from the superstition and errors of the past. Not surprisingly, the Japanese Occupation Government approved only pro-Japanese oriented fiction, so Cheng was forced to produce most of his work during this period under pseudonyms. Finally, under Communist rule, his work was again thought to carry no uplifting social messages and was, of course, banned.

The irony of these viewpoints is that Cheng's work was of enormous social significance in that it championed the rational approach to crime solving and to thinking in general. It was instrumental in introducing the elements of Western Thought to Chinese society in palatable form without actively advocating change. It merely made such changes seem reasonable and necessary. His villains were often corrupt officials and dishonest professionals, not traditional lower class idlers and misfits. His heroes were educated, rational people who cared about victims of oppression or cheating and who strove to improve society through leveling barriers.

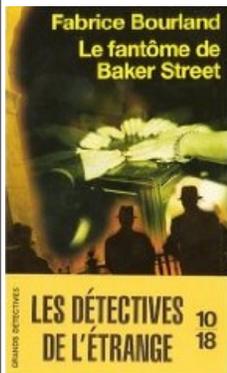
**Reviewed by:** Philip K. Jones, August 2008.

HE'S EVERYWHERE... Bill Barnes, one of the Hounds of the Internet, recently reported that while on a tour of Dubai in the United Arab Republic, he spotted an awning with the words "Sherlock Holmes" while exiting a mu-

seum. It turned out to be a "Sherlock Holmes Pub" attached to a hotel called The Arabian Courtyard. The pub was actually very well done—posters of Holmes on the wall, a glass display case of deerstalker, Meerschaum pipe, copies of the stories, frosted glass partitions between booths with the familiar head and shoulders we know and love. There was a small side room with a fake log fire which presumably was meant to be the sitting room of 221b. It had a couple of armchairs in front of the fire and a bookcase with more editions of the stories. The pub supplied a paper placemat which had some notes on Holmes (correct & pertinent) and a few weak non-Sherlockian jokes, but the watermark was of Indiana Jones. They also had caps and hats for sale ... "Waterstone's Exclusive Postcard Book" published a limited edition in July to benefit the National Year of Reading. Each postcard contains a very short story, including a Sherlockian pastiche by Neil Gaiman. You can read about the book at [www.waterstones.com/waterstonesweb/displayProductDetails.do?ski=6285395](http://www.waterstones.com/waterstonesweb/displayProductDetails.do?ski=6285395). You can read the stories at [www.waterstoneswrys.com](http://www.waterstoneswrys.com) .. Robert Downey, Jr. is trading his iron suit for a deerstalker hat. Based on an upcoming graphic novel by Lionel Wigram, Warner Bros is set to start shooting its latest Sherlock Holmes mystery drama with Guy Ritchie directing. Our first reaction was a loud "Gaaahhh!" but then we saw Downey playing an Australian playing a black man in *Tropic Thunder* and now we've decided to wait and see. If the storyline's good, he just may be able to pull it off. The film will put emphasis on Holmes skill as a boxer & swordsman. Release date currently is expected in 2010 ... On the other hand, Sony has a Sherlock Holmes comedy in development which will star Sascha Baron Cohen as Holmes and Will Ferrell as Watson, to be released by Columbia.... Following the demise of the ezine *Cobwebby Bottles*, Rafe McGregor has started a blog to post info of interest. Find it at <http://rafemcgregor.blogspot.com> ... Charles Foley, Jon Lellenberg and Daniel Stashower won both the MWA's Edgar Award for the best critical/biographical book and the Malice Domestic Agatha Award for the best non-fiction for *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*. Soon to be out in paperback ... *The Hollywood Reporter* lists a new TV series production in the works by *Central Partnership*, Russia's leading independent film producer. It will be a 32-episoder, based on Doyle's Holmes stories. Shooting is set to begin summer of 2009 and finish in 2010 ... The December 2007 issue of *Backtrack*, a railway history magazine, sported a 6-page article on *The Railway Journeys of Sherlock Holmes* by Nigel Digby. There's a website at [www.pendragonpublishing.co.uk](http://www.pendragonpublishing.co.uk). You (cont. on page 3)



(cont. from page 2) might be able to buy a back issue ... Check out [www.museumindocklands.org.uk/jacktheripper](http://www.museumindocklands.org.uk/jacktheripper). Currently the museum is running a Ripper exhibition and, of course, Holmes is mentioned (among innumerable fictional treatments of the Whitechapel murders) ... *The Vampire Empire*, the world's oldest Dracula society, now had a branch for Sherlockian members. It's called *The Sherlock Holmes Auxiliary* and you can access the website at [wiki.benecke.com/index.pho?title+2007-07-23](http://wiki.benecke.com/index.pho?title+2007-07-23) ... After taking a break, Roger Llewellyn has resumed his tour with *Sherlock Holmes..The Death and Life*. You can check out the play dates on his website at [www.makinprojects.co.uk/page31.html](http://www.makinprojects.co.uk/page31.html) ... Breese Books just released *The Vampire Empire*, a triad of ingenious and entertaining Sherlockian stories edited by Antony J. Richards... Amazon.com announced release in October what seems to be an interesting novel, *Wilde about Holmes* by Milo Yelesiyevich in which Holmes presses Oscar Wilde into service during Watson's absence to help protect presidential candidate Grover Cleveland from a sex scandal. You can pre-order it at Amazon.com ... A French novel titled *Le Fantome de Baker Street* by



Fabrice Courland has recently shown up on our radar. The story takes place in 1932 and involves Lady Conan Doyle hiring detectives Andrew Singleton and James Trelawney to investigate a possible haunting at a house in Baker Street which has recently been assigned the number 221 ...

For anyone who has John Gardner's *The Return of Moriarty* and *The Revenge of Moriarty*, you'll be happy to know that the 3rd & final volume will be out in November, titled simply *Moriarty* ... In the August 1st edition of the *London Times* there appeared an announcement that James (Jim) Moriarty passed away peacefully on Friday, 25 July aged 88. he had been married to "Vi" for nearly sixty years. Hm...wonder which one of the Violets he wound up with?

Bayard finds in this dazzling reinvestigation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, sometimes the master missed his mark. Using the last thoughts of the murder victim as his key, Bayard unravels the case, leading the reader to the astonishing conclusion that Holmes – and, in fact, Arthur Conan Doyle – got things all wrong: The killer is not at all who they said it was.

Part intellectual entertainment, part love letter to crime novels, and part crime novel in itself, *Sherlock Holmes Was Wrong* turns one of our most beloved stories delightfully on its head. Examining the many facets of the case and illuminating the bizarre interstices between Doyle's fiction and the real world, Bayard demonstrates a whole new way of reading mysteries: a kind of "detective criticism" that allows readers to outsmart not only the criminals in the stories we love, but also the heroes — and sometimes even the writers. (Recently translated from the French. Available in October.)

### CALENDAR SHERLOCKIANA

#### 2008

**October 4** - *The Second Newberry Library Sherlock Holmes/Conan Doyle Symposium* co-sponsored by The Hounds of the Baskervilles, held at Chicago Public Library, 9:30am.

**October 9-12** - *Bouchercon 39: Charmed to Death* in Baltimore, MD at the Wyndham. Guests of Honor Laura Lippman & John Harvey with Toastmaster Mark Billingham. See [bouchercon2008.blog.spot.com](http://bouchercon2008.blog.spot.com).

**October 10** - *Sherlock Holmes' Real Birthday Celebration* Chicago, IL contact Don Izban,

**October 24-26** - *Magna cum Murder Convention* sponsored by Ball State University in Muncie, IN. Visit [www.magnacummurder.com](http://www.magnacummurder.com) or email [magnacummurder@yahoo.com](mailto:magnacummurder@yahoo.com)

**November 1** - *The 33rd Annual Fall Gathering* of The Pleasant Places of Florida. The Rose and Crown pub. Seminole, FL. Contact Mike Bryan at

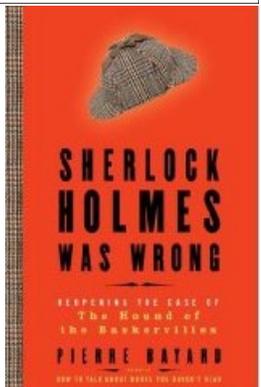
**November 7 - 9** - *Re-examining Conan Doyle: Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium*, University of Regina, Regina, SK, Canada. Contact Dr. Nils Clausson, Dept. Of English, University of Regina, Regina, SK S4S 0A2, Canada



In an article sent in by Mike Bryan, *Open-Reader* bemoans the fact that it did not gain enough developer & publisher support to deploy an open standard in the marketplace for a true consumer ebook. The accompanying photo was interesting.

A playfully brilliant re-creation of one of the most-loved detective stories of all time; the companion book no Holmes fan should be without.

"Eliminate the impossible," Holmes said, "and whatever is left must be the solution." But as Pierre



For the Record:

**THE LAST COURT OF APPEALS**

David McCallister, Master of the House,

(Master of

Ceremonies at most gatherings, host of the annual Wessex Cup)

Carl Heifetz, Representative (both with the Servants and with the Tradespeople),

(Correspondent)

Wanda & Jeff Dow, The Papers on the Sundial,

(Communications and Bookkeeping)

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