



2009

Communication No. 289

The Pleasant Places of Florida

From the Papers on the Sundial:

We had a grand gathering at Wessex Cup - 19th this year! The winner was GDansking Queen with appropriate colors of white & black halves and red sleeves. No. 10 was ridden by Pedro L. Cotto, Jr. and owned by Tic Stables. Make a note of the film festival in April. See you there!



Officer Carl L. Heifetz has successfully completed the three tripos examinations of The Fortescue Honors Program sponsored by the Watsonians, a Chicago based scion of the Baker Street Irregulars. Certificates were awarded for the following degrees: *Baccalaurata Scientia in Sherlockiana*, *Artium Magister in Sherlockiana*, and *Doctor of Sherlockiana*. This scholarly program was announced in the Communication No. 284, 2008, page 3. Carl also has published *Dr. Watson's Adventure of the Deadly*



Dr. Watson's Adventure of the Deadly

Reprint from *The New York Times*

Is That You, Sherlock? By Sarah Lyall, London

In a filthy, dank labyrinth of rooms below the streets of the East End, Sherlock Holmes was solving a case. That is, Robert Downey Jr., playing Holmes in the forthcoming film "Sherlock Holmes," was engaged in hand-to-hand, foot-to-stomach combat with a very big and very bad villain (Robert Maillat). Bam! Pow! Ouch! Both characters would end up knocked out on the floor, along with Holmes's trusty sidekick, Dr. John Watson, played by Jude Law.

Filmed in December, the scene presented a sharp corrective to the popular cinematic view of Holmes, at least the one propagated by the old films featuring the wonderfully named British actor Basil Rathbone. That Holmes occasionally wielded guns, leapt out of carriages and rushed through the fog with Errol Flynnesque panache, but mostly he was a giant brain inside a tweed suit, sexlessly debonair in the way Hollywood liked its leading men in the 1930s and 1940s. His Watson, played by Nigel Bruce, was a lumpy, good-natured, birdbrained foil for Holmes's brittle brilliance.

The Sherlock Holmes of "Sherlock Holmes," which is scheduled for release on Nov. 13, will not be wearing a deerstalker hat. Nor will he be wearing an Inverness overcoat, the kind with the dashing cloak that hangs over the shoulders as extra protection against the English rain. Sometimes — as in one fight scene — he

will not even be wearing a shirt. (This gives Mr. Downey a chance to show off his admirably chiseled abs.)

Sure, he will still be smarter than everyone within a three-planet radius, and he will retain his uncanny ability to intuit whole life stories from the tiniest speck of dust on a shoe. But he will do those things while being a man of action, a chaser, shooter and pummeler of criminals — "like James Bond in 1891," Joel Silver, one of the film's producers, said last fall.

Lionel Wigram, who conceived the story and is also a producer of the film, said that reinventing Holmes as an action hero made perfect sense. "I never agreed with the idea of the fairly stuffy Edwardian-type gentleman," Mr. Wigram said. "It wasn't my idea of Sherlock Holmes."

He was speaking in the underground catacomb, once part of London's prison system and standing in for its sewers in the film. The director, Guy Ritchie — the artist formerly known as Madonna's husband — was in a nearby room, watching the actors in their choreographed fight.

Mr. Ritchie, known for stylized, quick-talking, fast-moving films set among the criminals, lowlifes and hard men of London's underworld, would seem to be something of a gamble as director of such a big Hollywood extravaganza. His early films, including "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels" and "Snatch," remain his most successful, and he has had some bad patches. (Don't mention "Swept Away," which starred the erstwhile Mrs. Ritchie.)

His latest film, last year's "RocknRolla," was seen as a return to form by many critics and did well in Britain. But it made only \$5.7 million in the United States, according to boxofficemojo.com, a box-office tracking firm.

The "Sherlock Holmes" producers say that Mr. Ritchie's style is perfectly suited to their concept. "We thought he had the capacity and the ability to make a big, fun movie, and what really pushed it over the top was Robert Downey Jr.," Mr. Silver said.

Before Mr. Downey came along, Mr. Ritchie considered making the film about Sherlock Holmes as a young man, in the vein of "Batman Begins," positioning him somewhere between adulthood and the teenage Holmes of Barry Levinson's film "Young Sherlock Holmes" (1985). (cont. on page 2)



(cont. from page 1) But he soon scrapped that idea, betting on Mr. Downey's action-hero prowess, on display last year in "Iron Man," and on the singular take he was sure to bring the character. Mr. Downey's Holmes is darker than that of Mr. Rathbone or others who have taken on the part, like Christopher Plummer in "Murder by Decree" (1979) and Nicol Williamson in "The Seven-Per-Cent Solution" (1976). The new Holmes is rougher, more emotionally multilayered, more inclined to run with his clothing askew, covered in bruises and smudges of dirt and blood. This Holmes falls into modern-style funks between cases, lying on the sofa, suffused with anomie, unshaven and unkempt, surrounded by a pile of debris. He keeps his bills pinned to the wall with a Bowie knife.

But when he applies himself, Holmes is as fast with his body — he is a bare-knuckle boxer, a crack shot and an expert swordsman — as he is with his mind.

Character and actor share certain traits. Like Holmes with his cocaine habit, Mr. Downey has been buffeted by many internal vicissitudes, including a long spell of drug addiction. (Unlike Holmes, he has spent time in prison and in rehab centers and replaced all that with a regimen of therapy, nutrition and fitness. He has also become deft in the fast-paced, aggressive Chinese martial art of wing chun.)

Like Holmes, Mr. Downey, 43, has a mind so active it seems to run ahead of itself. He craves constant stimuli, partly for his own intellectual nourishment and partly, you suspect, to keep his demons at bay. His conversation flits from topic to topic in a manner that suggests he pursues his work as intensely, and intently, as Holmes pursues his.

"He's the archetype of a tortured perfectionist," Mr. Downey said of his character. As he spoke in his trailer between scenes, he whipped up, and then ate, a scarily healthy-looking concoction of what appeared to be Japanese vegetables, in a special dish. But he said that in his own case, what drives him is "confidence more than obsession."

"It means I won't let go. My experience shows me that I know how to win, that I'll end up in the end zone."

Mr. Downey said he and his fellow cast members, along with the director and producers, have been poring over the script to stamp out any hint of "elementary, my dear Watson"-type clichés. And as he spoke, his own Watson, Mr. Law, was in a nearby building reading a book about "Hamlet." (He is scheduled to play the title role in a West End production this spring.)

Mr. Law said he was enjoying upending the conventional wisdom about Watson: that he is fat and slow. "He's a man who left the military a few years ago and who takes a military approach to situations," he said. "He's slightly more strait-laced than Holmes but certainly no less brave." And, he added, while Watson is hardly as brilliant as Holmes — who is? — he's "certainly not stupid."

Back in the catacomb, Susan Downey, a producer on the film and Mr. Downey's wife, said Holmes is "a bit of a ladies' man, a bit of a brawler," adding: "He has a gambling problem. If you're a Sherlock Holmes fan who is in love with the original stories, then you'll appreciate him."

Arthur Conan Doyle's tales set the stage for the classic Holmes-Watson relationship, "the relish of language and the cerebral tennis matches that go on between them as they unravel this mystery," as Mr. Law described it. But Conan Doyle appears to have conceived his detectives as action characters, too, alluding to Watson's military service, to boxing matches and gunfights, and to Holmes's use of the martial art baritsu (he most likely meant bartitsu).

"So many of the ideas that Conan Doyle had took place offstage in his books," Ms. Downey said. "We have the technology, the budget and the means to carry them out."

Mr. Wigram said he had loved Sherlock Holmes since he was a boy, when his father read Conan Doyle's stories aloud to him. "I've been thinking for the last 10 years that there must be a way to reinvent Sherlock Holmes," he said. An executive with Warner Brothers until 2006, Mr. Wigram pursued the idea when he left to become a producer.

"I realized the images I was seeing in my head were different to the images I'd seen in previous films," he said. He imagined, for instance, "a much more modern, more bohemian character, who dresses more like an artist or a poet." A louche, slightly wicked-looking character, he thought, like someone from a Toulouse-Lautrec painting or a member of the Rolling Stones, perhaps Brian Jones, in their Victorian-dress period.

And Mr. Wigram conceived the story (Michael Johnson, Anthony Peckham and Mr. Ritchie are credited as the screenwriters) as having a broader sweep than any single Conan Doyle short story.

"Even though the stories are a joy to read and re-read, they do tend to be fairly small, contained murder mysteries," he said. "And so for the big mainstream audiences these days, I knew we would have to come up with something where the stakes were bigger and that had a big fantasy element."

He is not the only one dreaming (cont. on page 3)



(cont. from page 2)

of Holmes these days. A comedy starring Sacha Baron Cohen as Holmes and Will Ferrell as Watson is in the works. And the BBC is filming a one-hour story about Holmes, set in present-day London.

Mr. Ritchie's movie starts with Holmes apprehending a murderer and master of the dark arts named Lord Blackwood (Mark Strong) — a character based, Mr. Wigram said, on the notorious Victorian occultist Aleister Crowley. As he is led to the gallows, Lord Blackwood pledges to come back from the dead and continue his evil ways. He does just that, and the rest of the movie follows Holmes and Watson as they try to foil his plot. Rachel McAdams plays the enigmatic Irene Adler.

Mr. Wigram would not reveal anything about the cost of the movie, saying only that it was a "proper big-budget film."

Mr. Ritchie seemed refreshingly gleeful about that fact. "If I want something, I get it," he said. "I'm used to having to come out with a screwdriver the night before and fix things on the set, so this is very nice."

But will the movie really work as a Guy Ritchie movie, with all that quick pace and modern feel?

"Guy brings an energy and an expertise at physicality and action while being faithful to the period," Mr. Law said. "The Victorian London that Holmes and Watson were working in was the cesspit of the world. They're dealing with criminals and villains and street urchins."

Another question, since the movie is meant for a family audience — or as Mr. Ritchie put it, is "deliberately designed so I can watch it with my family and friends without any embarrassment."

Drugs?

No, Mr. Wigram said, speaking of Holmes. "He doesn't do cocaine in our movie."

SHERLOCKIAN NEWS

The Baker Street Dispatch has a new address: 263 Goddard Rd., Toledo, OH 43606

For the second time in 14 months, Minnesota author Jeff Falkingham has received a favorable review in the official newsletter of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. In its February 2009 issue (No. 290), *The District Messenger* says that Falkingham's latest work of historical fiction is "a story conveyed with an easy and natural authority," and that the story's narrator, Peter Smith, "is an amiable, intelligent and enthusiastic narrator, who shares Dr. Watson's talent for telling a story in English that's literate

without being in the least precious." The reviewer is speaking of *Sherlock Holmes: In Search of the Source*, released on January 6, 2009 - the 155th birthday of the famous detective. In the same newsletter's December 2007 edition (No. 278), Falkingham's first book, *Sherlock Holmes and the County Courthouse Caper*, was described as "a cracking good read" and "a real page-turner" by "a damned good story-teller." The new book, set in St. Paul in 1896, is available directly from its publisher at Xlibris.com. It is also available from Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com and others. The first book, set ten years earlier in the author's hometown of Browns Valley, Minnesota, can be ordered from the author at www.cccaper.com.

Camden House, out of circulation for a time, is now back up. You can check out the website at <http://www.ignisart.com/camdenhouse/canon/prio.htm>.

Want to perform Holmes? Go to www.theconsultingdetective.com/sixnapoleionsscript.pdf and download a script in the public domain.

CALENDAR SHERLOCKIANA

April 18 - Sherlockian Film Festival, Seminole Library, 9200 113th St. N. Seminole, Seminole Campus of SPC. 10:30 AM. Contact The Unopened Newspaper at

Or just show up! All are welcome, members and non-members alike! Films featured are *The Spider Woman* (1944), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985) and *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1976)

April 18-19 - *Gathering of Southern Sherlockians*. Presentations by scions from Atlanta, Birmingham, Nashville and Greenville. Focus on *Hound of the Baskervilles*. Contact Kent Ross at

May 7-9 - *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: A Sesquicentennial Symposium* at the Houghton Library at Harvard. Details available at http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/doyle_symposium.html. A major celebration of the 150th anniversary of Doyle's birth and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the BSI.

May 15-17 - *Sherlock Holmes/ACDoyle Symposium*, Dayton, OH

May/June TBA - *34th Annual Spring Gathering*, TBA

October 14 - *Pre-Bouchercon Event: Doyle, Bouchercon, Fleming* Must be an attendee of Convention (see next)

October 15-18 - *The 40th Bouchercon World Mystery Convention*, Indianapolis, IN. www.bouchercon2009.com

October 30-Nov. 1 - *BSI Triennial Silver Blaze/Chicago Silver Blaze* at Hawthorn Race Course, Cicero-Stickney, IL. Race on the 31st, brunch Nov. Hotel Oak Brook Doubletree. Email Susan Diamond at

The Pleasant Places of Florida

(founded in 1972)

Rev. Leslie Marshall, B.S.I. 1972-1977
Dr. Benton Wood, B.S.I. 1977 - 1988
Bill Ward, B.S.I. 1988 - 1999
Dr. Benton Wood, B. S.I. 1999 -1996
The Last Court of Appeals 1997 - present

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,

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