

OPUNTIA

63.1C

ISSN 1183-2703

April 2007

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them.

Whole-numbered OPUNTIA's are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

SHERLOCKIANA: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

Pastiches: Scientifiction.

There are a number of pastiches which involve science fact or science fiction. Victorian science, that is, when electricity was the coming thing and the most advanced business offices were buying the newly-invented typewriter. Colin Bruce has carved his niche in the world of Sherlockiana with a series of pastiche collections used to explain science to the readers. Holmes solves each case by explaining to Watson some aspect of science that he used to reach his conclusion.

The Strange Case Of Mrs. Hudson's Cat (Cat) (1997, hardcover) is an anthology of short stories by Bruce used to illustrate some aspect of physics, mostly quantum and relativistic. In addition to Holmes and Watson, Professors Challenger, Summerlee, and Illingworth come in and out of the cases, as their on-going scientific feuds over whether light is a particle or a wave recapitulate our timeline's struggle with the idea that God plays dice. At a public lecture attended by Holmes and Watson, for example: "*Heated words were exchanged. Eventually Challenger seized an ornamental sword which hung on the wall, shouted that it was Ockham's razor, and pursued Illingworth from the platform with it. It was a field day for the reporters present.*"

The cases build on each other. As each one is solved, the newly elicited principle of physics is used as an axiom on which to progress to the next case. In one of the earlier cases, we are first introduced to Dr. Illingworth in "The Case Of The Sabotaged Scientist". He is doing work at the British Museum which requires long-exposure photographic plates through telescopes. The starfield photos, alas, came out fogged. Who sabotaged them? After an all-night vigil by Dr. Watson, it is determined that the plate was left next to an African idol. Watson was sitting between the idol and the plate, and his skeletal form shows up in the photo. From this, Holmes deduces X-rays and radioactive elements.

After that case, the idol drops out of sight for the next few stories, to then re-surface in "The Case Of The Energetic Anarchist". Herein, Watson's opening commentary on how plagues spread is neatly matched to an anarchist threat to destroy London with a 100,000 ton explosion. This is laughed off by both Holmes and Scotland Yard, for no one could smuggle that amount of guncotton into the city without being noticed. As the day's events progress, it has been learned by British Museum staff that the matching half of the idol has been found, of all places, at a seaside resort. Interesting but trivial to the Victorians, to whom 'critical mass' is a nonsense phrase. Holmes and Watson have called upon Professors Challenger and Summerlee, who are arguing the veracity of energy and mass being the same thing. Just as they

deduce that $E = mc^2$, Holmes realizes that if such is true, then the idol's radiation will increase like a plague if matched with its missing half. A mad rush to the seaside then ensues, trying to stop the British Museum assistant from putting together the two halves. The rush fails. They see a pillar of light, a shock wave, and a mushroom cloud. A resort beach thereupon cratered is subsequently explained away to the press as the unfortunate result of a munitions boat running aground.

Conned Again, Watson (Conned) is a collection of stories by Colin Bruce (2001) to explain probability and counter-intuition. The stories are based on mathematical fallacies held by people and how various confidence tricks work. "The Case Of The Unfortunate Businessman" has Watson's cousin falling for both a confidence scheme and mis-reading how-to books on improving his margin of profit in his business. Holmes lectures the Watsons on probabilities of the former, and points out for the latter that profit must be calculated in absolute numbers, not relative percentages. A modern example of the latter fallacy is the dot.coms that based their share prices on the fact that their percentage losses were declining and thus somehow a good buy. Of course, the bills had to be paid in absolute dollars, and when they ran out of them, they went out of business.

“The Case Of The Gambling Nobleman” (Conned) reminds us that in betting in any casino game, the odds are always with the house. Double-or-nothing bets, a popular system with gamblers who think they were the first to discover this method, never work in the long run. This is because the bets increase exponentially and quickly overwhelm your stake money, no matter how much you have. Sooner or later, you reach a point where you can’t double the next bet because you don’t have the money.

Radioactive elements were the cutting edge of science in the Victorian era. “The Mystery Of The Addleton Curse” by Barrie Roberts (Mammoth) has Holmes and Watson called out to a rural village not for a crime but to solve why villagers are sickening and dying. An archaeologist excavated an ancient barrow (burial mound) notorious for never having snow on it or vegetation. The archaeologist and his son die of a strange wasting disease, as do many villagers. When the village photographer, hired to photograph the excavations in close-up, has problem with fogged-up negatives, the reader quickly guesses radioactive substances.

Holmes determines that the ancient barrow builders had found a rock of pure pitchblende and, having learned it was deadly to anyone possessing it, buried it in the barrow to confine its malign influence. Holmes is aware of radioactivity and the work of Madame Curie. The barrow is closed up again so as to preserve the villagers. Watson feels that the danger of pitchblende is now

understood and concludes that: “ ... we do not have to fear that they will ever be carelessly unleashed upon the world.”

Also from Mammoth is a crossover story “The Adventure Of The Inertial Adjustor” by Stephen Baxter. H.G. Wells shows up to get help from Holmes concerning the death of a friend who invented the Inertial Chamber. This device changed natural laws so that (all else being equal) a heavier object falls faster than a lighter object of the same shape. In our universe, of course, weight does not affect the speed of falling for similarly shaped objects. The murderer thought things through better than the inventor, and took him out with a neat bit of alternative physics using that device. This story is a good example of extrapolating from a divergence. John Campbell, the former editor of ANALOG, the hard SF magazine, would have been pleased to accept this story.

“The House That Jack Built” by Edward Wellen (NASH) is a Victorian mad scientist story where Moriarty tries to download Holmes’ mind in an infernal contraption. Or are Moriarty and Holmes the same man? They are never seen together, so one wonders. Nonetheless, the story is a bit tedious, since too many clues and vignettes are scattered about.

David Langford writes about “The Repulsive Story Of The Red Leech” (Mammoth) in which a village lawyer wires his desk with electricity to prevent an heir

from signing documents which would give him his inheritance. An inheritance which said lawyer has mis-appropriated. Not too believable, as it would require an idiot who would sit in the exact position required for a weak electrical current to palsy his hand so that he couldn't sign his name. The paralyzing apparatus was too complicated and fantastical to be expected to work properly. Also detracting from the story is Dr. Watson being upset by the sight of a tropical blood-sucking leech. Since he was an Army surgeon who served in combat in India, he had undoubtedly become hardened to blood and guts, and a leech would not give him such a turn.

Photography was also a cutting-edge technology in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In "The Siren Of Sennen Cove" by Peter Tremayne (Murder), Holmes and Watson are called out to the jagged shores of Cornwall. The image of a siren (as in mythology, not the air-raid device) is luring ships onto the rocks. It is done by a man who has invented a film projector, displayed the images onto guano-covered rocks. In the time-honoured tradition of Cornwall, he is doing it to salvage valuables from the wrecks, using a newfangled diving suit to extract the loot. "The Adventure Of The Arabian Knight" by Loren Estleman (Murder) has Sir Richard Burton (the explorer, of course, not the actor) visiting Holmes regarding the theft of an Egyptian manuscript he was translating. The translation revealed the location of a previously unknown boy king named Tutankhamen. The thief

photographed the manuscript with a newfangled Kodak camera imported from the USA, then burned the original manuscript. Any police search would be looking for a manuscript, not a camera.

"The Adventure Of The Man Who Never Laughed" by J.N. Williamson (Holidays) has Holmes hired to locate a missing man with Moebius syndrome (facial paralysis). Watson is of significance here because he makes use of new techniques invented by Freud and of discoveries by Waldeyer-Hartz about the physical nature of the nervous system (neurons were just then being recognized for what they were).

Pastiches: The Great Hiatus.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tired of the Holmes stories and wanted instead to write Great Literature (which he did and which is now dated and forgotten). Like many authors, he resented being typecast, and so he killed off Holmes in one final titanic struggle with Professor Moriarty, both men falling to their deaths at Reichenbach Falls, Switzerland. Public demand forced him to return Holmes to life three years later, the supposed death being explained away as necessary for Holmes to deal with the underworld. Holmes claimed he was traveling about the world, under a variety of names such as Sigerson, the Norwegian explorer (no first name given to Watson).

Holmes's summary of events to Watson was inconsistent, and Sherlockians refer to this gap as The Great Hiatus. Nature and publishers alike abhor a vacuum, so Michael Kurland has edited a new volume of pastiches titled **Sherlock Holmes: The Hidden Years** (Hidden) to fill in that lacuna. The stories are passable in themselves, but Kurland should have edited the anthology better. The first few stories are about Holmes qua Sigerson, but each author gave Sigerson a different first name. It is jarring to pass from one story to another in sequence where Sigerson changes from Arne to Oscar to Thorvald. In other stories, Holmes identifies himself by his real name to various people and expects them to keep the secret. Indeed. It becomes increasingly unbelievable that no matter where he goes, Holmes can speak the local language like a native, without accent, be it Tibetan, Aleutian, German, Thai, or Norwegian. He is additionally too much the superhuman, scaling Himalayan peaks, playing first violin in an Austro-Hungarian orchestra, and trekking out onto the Arctic ice on an extended expedition.

Another jarring note is that the stories are out of sequence, jumping back and forth from one continent to another, and not in chronological order. The Hidden anthology starts off with Sigerson stories, then jumps backwards to Holmes in the immediate aftermath of Reichenbach Falls, then to the USA, back to the Falls, and so forth. There are several conflicting Reichenbach stories, which should have been framed in a mutual

timeline rather than standalone stories that jar the reader going straight through the anthology. On their own, say for example as separate magazine appearances over months or years, the stories read well. In one anthology, they rattle and bang against each other. All of this should have been sorted out by the editor. The stories are fair to middling mysteries in the usual pastiche style. Most I won't mention, but some are listed further on under other sections.

"The Adventure Of The Missing Detective" by Gary Lovisi has Holmes transiting to an alternative timeline as he topples to his death at the falls. Holmes finds himself in a timeline where Moriarty is honoured for services to the Empire by King Edward in 1892, where Queen Victoria died a decade before her time in a carriage accident.

Supporting Characters: General Remarks.

Often pastiches elaborate the lives of minor characters and spear-carriers and put them in the foreground. One anthology of pastiches on this theme is **My Sherlock Holmes** (MSH), edited by Michael Kurland (2003). Each story is narrated by a supporting character from the canon.

Sherlock Holmes' archenemy was Professor James Moriarty, unheard of through most of the canon until he suddenly shows up as "the most dangerous man in Europe". Moriarty was the kingpin of all Victorian era crime, were we to believe Holmes. Even among Sherlockians, there has always been suspicion as to whether Moriarty was the sinner that Holmes said him to be, since even the greatest criminal mastermind will eventually become known to police. His sudden appearance in the canon is generally agreed to be a matter of Doyle stretching for new plots. As we say in this television era, he was jumping the shark.

The Professor was quite the intellectual, and his paper "The Dynamics Of An Asteroid" was said by Holmes to be the last word on the subject. Isaac Asimov used this throwaway tidbit about Moriarty in a short story "The Ultimate Crime", published in **More Tales Of The Black Widowers**, in which the asteroid paper is discussed by the Black Widowers. This group met monthly in New York City and discussed a particular puzzle or mystery brought forward by someone at the table. Although Asimov was a member of the Baker Street Irregulars, the Black Widowers were based on a non-Sherlockian group he belonged to, the Trap Door Spiders, and the stories were not pastiches. Asimov was not an enthusiastic Sherlockian, but, as he wrote in his autobiography, "The Ultimate Crime" was prompted by a fellow

BSI member who suggested to Dr. Asimov that a scientist like him would be the perfect author to work "The Dynamics Of An Asteroid" into a pastiche.

"The Case Of The Friesland Outrage" by June Thomson (SJSJH) has Moriarty striking a blow from beyond the grave. The story takes place after Holmes has returned from the Great Hiatus and Moriarty is dead. The Professor had made contingency plans that if he were killed, then his organization would wait a few years and finally strike out at Holmes. They assumed that Holmes would have relaxed his guard and could be killed, but they assumed wrong.

"The Adventure Of The Russian Grave" by William Barton and Michael Capobianco (Orbit) combines both Moriarty's asteroid book and him striking a blow from the grave. Holmes is called out in 1908 from his retirement on the Sussex Downs to investigate a mysterious message written by Moriarty before he took the fatal plunge and just rediscovered. He decodes the message and determines that it mentions a place in Siberia and a specific time and date. Holmes and Watson journey to Tunguska to see what Moriarty hid there. Just in the nick of time, Holmes remembers that Moriarty was an expert at predicting asteroid orbits. He and Watson run for it just in time to escape the blast that destroyed the area and which today is generally believed to have been a comet impact.

“The Future Engine” by Byron Tetrick (Orbit) has the son of Charles Babbage, the founder of computer engineering, come to Holmes to tell him his father’s Analytical Engine was stolen from storage. In our timeline, Babbage never got around to perfecting his computer but in this story he actually did get a working programmable device, albeit it was never put into use. Holmes concludes that Moriarty stole it from storage. Later in the story it is discovered that Moriarty has upgraded the mechanical computer and was using it to help him manipulate the European financial markets. The machine is recovered, Moriarty escapes, and Holmes destroys the machine as a weapon too dreadful to use. I think he worried needlessly. Had Babbage put his machine into production the first-adopters would be too busy flaming each other in online discussion groups or downloading pictures of naked princesses and opera divas.

Michael Kurland has adopted the most dangerous man in Europe as his particular pastiche leading character. He explains the original meeting between Homes and Moriarty in “Years Ago And In A Different Place” (MSH), narrated by Moriarty. The first meeting was when both were students together at university and if not hostile toward each other, were at least unfriendly neutrals. They are drawn into a case together when one of their professors was murdered. Moriarty solves the case first, determining that the culprit was a young woman Holmes was in love with. Holmes never forgives Moriarty for destroying his illusions.

In another short story by Kurland, “Reichenbach” (Hidden), he has Holmes and Moriarty as unwilling collaborators forced to work together by Mycroft Holmes. Some unknown power is plotting against the British Empire. The death of Holmes and Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls is staged to allow them to hare about the Adriatic Sea to prevent a staged appearance by a fake warship that would plunge Britain into war.

Kurland continues the cross-action between Moriarty and Holmes in “The Seven Fingers Of The Devil’s Left Hand” (New Strand Mag, 2005 October) in which the two are competitors investigating the theft of Chinese antiquities from a museum. The curator is found impaled on a Ming Dynasty pikestaff, and seven priceless figurines missing. Moriarty scatters false clues about to mislead Holmes, while seeking to recover the valuables on his own account. An interesting account of Victorian gamesmanship.

Kurland’s collection **The Infernal Device And Others** (2001, trade paperback) contains three short novels about Moriarty. “The Infernal Device” starts off with Moriarty receiving a mail bomb at home in London, England, then suddenly switches to Constantinople. The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire is testing his new submarine, which mysteriously explodes and disappears. From there, the scene shifts to the Russian Empire, whose minions are nervous about the possibility of a war with Britain.

antiquities being shipped by train.

Moriarty is hired by the Russians to locate Trepoff, one of their spies in England who has gone rogue and has decided to freelance his own foreign policy instead of following the Tsar's. This in turn catches the interest of Holmes, who assumes that Moriarty is up to no good against Britain. Both finally come together in time to stop Trepoff from using the stolen submarine to torpedo the Royal Yacht as Queen Victoria watches a regatta.

The next story is "The Paradol Paradox", which begins with a recent heir to the Earldom of Whitton seeking Moriarty's assistance. The new Earl is suspected in the death of the previous Earl, his older brother, who died while residing at the Paradol Club in the company of loose women. The real culprit turns out to be a mad scientist who specializes in blood transfusions. Might not the blood of a young woman rejuvenate an older man when transfused? Unfortunately for the doctor, and even more so for the patient, the concept of blood types was not yet understood. Some of those aging Lotharios have deadly reactions to the wrong blood type.

The third story, "Death By Gaslight" starts off with someone who is slitting throats in foggy London for some reason. The victims are all highly placed in society or politics, and as it turns out, all members of the same club. It also turns out that their morals are not as high as their social standing. Interlinked with this plot is Moriarty's plan to relieve a Col. Blimp type of jewels and

Of Kurland's novels about Moriarty, I have **The Great Game** (2001, trade paperback). The Professor is plagued by Holmes, who attributes all the unsolved major crimes of Europe to him. This novel opens with Holmes and Watson trailing spies in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some of whom work for Professor Moriarty. The first murder victim is an Austrian who comes calling at the Professor's house in London, but before the butler can show him in, the visitor suddenly departs this life on the doorstep as a result of a crossbow bolt. The scene then switches to Austria, where anarchists and spies are busy, more murders are done, and Moriarty shows up to see what is going on. Evidence gradually develops that all the apparently different anarchist groups are being manipulated by a man known as the Ferret, in preparation for one big outrage. Moriarty, Holmes, and Watson meet up at a fete, and are forced to collaborate in foiling the plot. The denouement is based on an incredible coincidence, and the ending of the plot would have been better if the logic of the story had been followed through. Kurland writes an easy-to-read style, although he tends to wander away from the main characters for chapters at a time.

"Moriarty And The Real Underworld" by John Gardner (NASH) is a factual article about The Family, as the Victorians criminals collectively referred to themselves. Those who think our present-

day society is crime-ridden should be thankful we do not have the crime rate of the Victorian era.

Supporting Characters: The Second Most Dangerous Man.

The character of Col. Sebastian Moran, said to be the second most dangerous man in Europe (after Moriarty) shows up at intervals in the Holmes canon. It seems to me that if I found out that people were calling me the second-most dangerous man in Europe, I would take that as an insult. “What do you mean, second most dangerous?” Moran is popular with pastiche writers as well.

“The Affray At The Kildare Street Club” by Peter Tremayne (Mammoth) explains the initial meeting between Holmes when he was a university student in Dublin and Sebastian Moran. (Holmes, many people are surprised to learn, was Anglo-Irish, with French blood on his mother’s side.) They clash in a snobby club, where Moran is caught stealing, and is expelled not only from the club but from Ireland (for he, too, is Anglo-Irish). Moran would later surface in the Doyle canon as the sometime second-in-command to Professor Moriarty.

“A Study In Orange” by Peter Tremayne (MSH) uses the Irish connection by involving Moran and the Orange Order. They stage the death of Cardinal Tosca in cooperation with English

politicians who want to disrupt Home Rule for the Irish.

Supporting Characters: The Woman.

Irene Adler outsmarted Sherlock Holmes in the canon story “A Scandal In Bohemia”. He always referred to her later as The Woman, and while she went out of his life thereafter, he thought of her often.

“Cabaret Aux Assassins” by Cora Black (MSH) has Irene Adler and Holmes becoming involved in the Dreyfus affair, each working at cross-purposes as might be expected. She also comes under pressure from the French military, who are still attempting to suppress the incident (Zola had not yet published “J’Accuse”).

“Sherlock Holmes And *The* Woman” by Michael Harrison (NASH), is an account by Dr. Watson reminiscing in 1929 as he looks back on the true facts that he was forced to disguise in “A Scandal In Bohemia”. Irene Adler’s real identity, according to Watson, was Lillie Langtry (the Courtney Love of her day), and it was missing jewels, not a compromising photo, that was to be retrieved.

“A Scandal In Winter” by Gillian Linscott (Holidays) is told from a girl’s point of view, and takes place at a Swiss ski lodge. It is in the later years of Holmes and Watson.

Both are white-haired old men, and Irene Adler was on her second husband. “was”, since the year before he died at the lodge under mysterious circumstances, and she is the suspect. Holmes is determined to find the truth, and proves it was an accident of an entirely different nature.

The Canary Trainer by Nicholas Meyer (1995) has nothing to do with the notorious Wilson but is instead a re-write of the Phantom of the Opera story. Holmes is working in the Paris Opera House during the Great Hiatus and investigates the many problems afflicting the management. Such as a suicide found hanging under the stage, or was it murder? And who sawed down the chandelier? The musical director is Gaston Leroux, and the diva is Irene Adler, who asks Holmes to investigate the goings-on. His job is to track down the Phantom in the bowels of the Opera House, while simultaneously earning a living as a first violin in the orchestra pit. A readable novel but pretty much a story already told, with Holmes jammed sideways into the narrative.

Carole Nelson Douglas has written a series of Irene Adler novels, which confusingly changed titles between the first and subsequent printings. I will review them under their original titles, but before you order any, check the bibliographies very carefully and make certain you are ordering the correct one if it is under a different title. Before discussing them, I will mention one anthology story she wrote, “The Thief Of Twelfth Night” (Holidays), involving

the theft of an emerald at a manor house.

-10-

Holmes is hired to investigate, but so is Irene Adler, who appears in disguise.

The Douglas series of novels begins with **Good Night, Mr. Holmes** (1990, mass market paperback), which sets up all the characters, backgrounds, and events for the subsequent novels. The narrator is a parson’s orphaned daughter, a humble unemployed shopgirl named Penelope Huxleigh, who stumbles into employment as Adler’s personal secretary. The novel has occasional chapters narrated by Watson but mostly concentrates on Adler’s point of view. It opens by tying up some loose ends from the Holmes canon, then starts with him being hired by Tiffany of the New York jeweler Tiffany’s. He is asked to locate a fabulous belt of diamonds, worn by a French queen who lost her head in the Revolution, after which the diamonds haven’t been seen since.

Huxleigh, whom Adler insists in calling her Nell, is priggish and small-c conservative, but is gradually educated by Adler into the ways of the world. Adler is also hired by Tiffany to find the diamonds. In the process, she meets Godfrey Norton, a barrister whose father apparently was the last known to have the diamonds. Nell, having taken a course on how to operate the newfangled typewriter, is hired by Norton as his secretary, he not being as resistant to change as fellow barristers of the Inns of Court, who

want only male clerks who write well in large letters. (Law clerks in those days were paid by the page.) Adler then goes off to Europe to further her operatic career, and becomes romantically entangled with the King of Bohemia. He won't take no for an answer, and Adler has to flee to London. From there, the story "A Scandal In Bohemia" is told, but this time from her point of view, not Watson's and, indirectly, the King's. She finds the diamonds, marries Norton, and they flee together with Nell to Europe to escape the wrath of the King. All told, the novel tells a good story and reads well.

June Thomson has written a speculative fact article "Appendix: An Hypothesis Regarding The Real Identity Of The King Of Bohemia" (SDSH) which discusses who the real-life analogue of the King of Bohemia was. Bohemia did not have its own king in Victorian times, it couldn't have been Prince Edward who was then already married, and by elimination, it must have been Count Herbert von Bismarck, son of the famous power behind the German throne.

The second Douglas novel in the Irene Adler series is **Good Morning, Irene** (1990, mass market). It opens with Adler and Norton having faked their deaths in a train wreck in order to escape the attentions of the King of Bohemia. The problem now is that she has also killed her career as an operatic singer, and she and her husband, along with the faithful Nell, are at loose ends.

The three of them are living off the proceeds from selling the belt of diamonds stone by stone. Resting in Paris, the trio are not long there before the first corpse appears. Bram Stoker, the original author of the Dracula novel, also shows up. (What is so rare as a Victorian detective pastiche without him?) Holmes and Watson make cameo appearances, mostly to remind us that this novel is set in their universe, not because there is any real need to have them in the plot.

More bodies are found, each with the tattoo of a single letter. A young woman is saved from drowning herself; she was tattooed for unknown reasons by what is now developing as a conspiracy spanning decades. A trip to Monte Carlo becomes a chase with assorted exciting adventures along the way. The outlines of the conspiracy come into view, and there is hidden treasure at the end of it all. Just before the denouement, Holmes meets face to face with Adler in Monaco, but ends up leaving the principality prior to Adler solving the case. In the actual denouement, it is Adler who shouts "J'accuse!". Justice is done, not by the courts, but by backstairs thuggery in high places.

The novel is readable, and starts to point Adler away from the Sherlockian canon into her own timeline. Nell is as priggish as ever, but one can see her starting to liberalize her views of life ever so slightly, as she adjusts to continental life.

The third novel in the Adler series is **Irene At Large** (1992, mass market). It begins with an account of the Battle of Maiwand, Afghanistan, where Dr. Watson was wounded twice. This, by the way, was an actual battle, which took place on 1880-07-27 and ended with a British rout. Not for the last time, the poms underestimated the restless natives and failed to scout the terrain. The account of the battle sets the stage for an 1889 mystery with Adler. A survivor of the battle crosses paths with Adler in Paris. He tells the story of his work at Maiwand as a spy who had been betrayed, who had been saved by an unknown English army surgeon subsequently wounded twice, and who was, a decade later, tracking the betrayer through Europe.

The survivor is Quentin Stanhope, who gives Nell her first kiss, an event of epic proportions for the prim ex-governess. He disappears in Paris, shortly before a Captain Morgan appears, seeking him. Nell and Godfrey go to London to interview a mysterious Dr. Watson mentioned by Stanhope, and eventually succeed in locating the missing man. Their search intertwines with a case Sherlock Holmes is working on involving a missing naval treaty. Morgan is discovered to be Col. Sebastian Moran, late of the Indian Army, and the man who betrayed Stanhope. He not only is seeking Stanhope to kill him (the only good prosecution witness is a dead one) but to buy that naval treaty from the thief. Stanhope and Moran supposedly fight to the death, but both escape and decide to go into hiding in opposite

directions. Moran's cover as a spy having been blown, it is inferred that he will soon get a day job with Prof. Moriarty. But that is another novel.

There are indeed other novels in this series, but having read them once, I didn't find them worth re-reading, so my review of Douglas's books stops here.

Supporting Characters: Mycroft Holmes.

Sherlock's smarter brother was a faceless bureaucrat in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, a behind-the-scenes manipulator. He was also lazy and fat, seldom stirring from an easy chair, a predecessor to Nero Wolfe.

"Mycroft's Great Game" by Gary Lovisi (MSH) deals with both Mycroft and his cats-paw Prof. James Moriarty. Sherlock is unaware of the connection, and Mycroft is put to considerable trouble to keep him from finding out that the Napoleon of crime is running errands for the Foreign Ministry. Mycroft tries to maneuver Sherlock out of London by sending him on a wild goose chase to Reichenbach Falls. Unfortunately, Col. Sebastian Moran, the second most dangerous man in Europe, has his own agenda and pursues Sherlock. The whole thing runs out of control, but concludes with a sappy ending.

Quinn Fawcett was a collaborative nom de plume of Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and Bill Fawcett. They wrote a series of novels under that name using Mycroft as the central character, narrated by his personal secretary, a Scotsman named Paterson Erskine Guthrie. Each chapter ends with an extract from the diary of Mycroft's valet Philip Tyers, which is used to explain things Guthrie didn't know about. The novels read well as Victorian action adventures, but clash with one aspect of the original canon. Doyle established Mycroft as a fat man who never travelled anywhere except between his rooms, his club, and Whitehall. Fawcett has Mycroft traipsing all over Europe and elsewhere, which is out of sorts for the man but could be acceptable. What is unbelievable is that despite his girth, Mycroft can scale castle walls and chase culprits on foot at a pace that would wind a professional athlete.

The first novel in the series is **Against The Brotherhood** (1997). The Brotherhood is a secret organization infiltrating the capitals of Europe, a cross between Freemasonry and Satanism, with a touch of Aztec rituals thrown in. The immediate problem at hand for Mycroft and Guthrie is to ride shotgun on an unreliable Scotsman who is bringing back a secret treaty that the British government signed. The Scotsman was picked for his social class, not his ability as a courier. The Brotherhood want to get a sneak peak at the treaty, and Mycroft and Guthrie have to foil their accursed aims. It turns out that the Brotherhood have a breakaway

offshoot called the Golden Lodge, so the novel develops into a three-way contest on board the train bringing the Scotsman back to London. Sufficient loose ends are left at the end of the novel to be picked up later in the series.

The second novel by Quinn Fawcett is **Embassy Row** (1998), which takes place in London. Britain and Japan are negotiating a secret treaty, which the Brotherhood and the Austro-Hungarian Empire wish to abort. Much of the novel takes place at the Swiss embassy, as neutral ground, where the treaty was finalized by Mycroft and his Japanese counterpart. A British Lord who was supposed to sign the treaty as a witness is found in the embassy gardens with a Japanese knife in his back. Matters are not helped when both sides learn to their dismay that the second son of the Emperor, a cadet at the Dartmouth Royal Navy Academy, had been having an affair with the wife of the deceased. Between that, getting the treaty signed, and trying to evade Brotherhood assassins, Mycroft and Guthrie have a busy time of it.

The third novel in the series is **The Flying Scotsman** (1999), which is essentially a re-write of the first novel, except that the train is going to Edinburgh, not across the European continent. Prince Oscar of Sweden-and-Norway (as it then was) took part in signing a treaty between Sweden and Britain. In a dazzling display of originality, the treaty stays where it is and it is the Prince who must be hustled on the train

to Scotland where a Swedish naval vessel will take him home, with Mycroft and Guthrie acting as his bodyguards. The Brotherhood object, as well they might, and hope to disrupt relations between the two countries by assassinating the Prince. There are two murders en route, and delays aplenty such that the railroad staff start betting with each other that this will be the slowest run the Flying Scotsman ever made. The Golden Lodge shows up again to stick in their oar. The Prince is safely delivered and the Brotherhood will no doubt return again.

This is as far as I went in the series. Although the writing quality was good, it became evident by the third volume that the Brotherhood would never be vanquished, Mycroft and Guthrie would be repeating the same plots with only the locales changed, and the Golden Lodge would continue to mysteriously come and go. Some people like reading ten-volume trilogies where the plot coupons are recycled; I don't.

A different type of brotherhood plagued Mycroft in a short story by Peter Tremayne, "The Kidnapping Of Mycroft Holmes" (New Strand Mag, 2003 May). He has been kidnapped by Irish radicals, and it is not certain which type of radical, the Unionist or the Republican. Sherlock and Watson are called out to help investigate. The story spends a bit of time on the Home Rule controversy of the late 1800s/early 1900s. Tremayne evidently has researched the history and wants to fit it all into the short

story. An additional subtext is Sherlock's quietness on his Irish ancestry, as he understandably wants to avoid the prejudice that the English had towards them.

Supporting Characters: Mrs. Hudson.

Mrs. Hudson was the long-suffering housekeeper for Holmes and Watson at 221B Baker Street. In the canon, her duties were confined to showing in guests and cooking meals.

The short story "Mrs. Hudson Reminisces" by Linda Robertson (MSH) is written in interview format, the narrator being a journalist who sought out Mrs. Hudson in her retirement in Perthshire (she was a Scotswoman). Holmes still corresponds with her from his retirement in the Sussex Downs, and he gave her the gift of a Baskerville puppy, fortunately much friendlier than the original hound. Mrs. Hudson remarks that she thought Holmes and Watson were good tenants compared to some of their predecessors (such as the Great Pontif, a circus fire-eater who once nearly burned down 221 Baker Street when practicing while drunk), and paid their rent on time. She tells the story of the time Holmes helped clear her husband of a charge of murder (and yes, there was a Mr. Hudson).

Mrs. Hudson And The Spirit's Curse (2004) is a novel by Martin Davies, narrated by Mrs. Hudson's tweeny (girl servant)

Flottie. The story opens with a visit to Holmes of client Nathaniel Moran, lately returned from Sumatra under some sort of native curse. (Pause for a rant: since this Moran has no connection with the second most dangerous man in Europe, the use of this surname is distracting and uncalled for.) As Holmes hunts for clues, so does Mrs. Hudson in a different direction and with a condescending tone of amused superiority over Holmes. Assorted murders are done or attempted, and the Mrs. and her tweeny are in the thick of it.

The conspirators in the crimes are gradually whittled down by mostly foul means and eventually we learn that the butler did it. That particular cliché didn't bother me. What did was a cameo appearance by a gentleman burglar named Raffles, who shows up at a convenient moment, steals some badly needed documents for Mrs. Hudson, and then disappears from the story. I don't know what it is about pastiches and alternative history that makes authors want to drag in famous characters whether they fit or not, instead of keeping the story in its original universe. Other than that, the novel reads well.

Sydney Hosier has written a series of novels involving Mrs. Hudson, starting off with the 1997 book **Elementary, Mrs. Hudson**. In this storyline, Mrs. Hudson is asked by an old friend, Violet Warner, to have Holmes investigate a case for her. Holmes and Watson being away in Scotland for a fortnight, Mrs. Hudson

decides to respond herself and makes the trip out to the English countryside. It turns out that the dowager of a manor house, for whom Mrs. Warner was a lady-in-waiting, died in her sleep in a mysterious manner. As the two ladies begin investigating the case, another murder is done, that of a young woman bludgeoned to death on the estate grounds. (An aside: What is so rare as a murder mystery with only one death?) The inept local constabulary arrest the stable boy for lack of any Usual Suspects, but the ladies prove he didn't do it. Unfortunately the author decided to make Mrs. Warner a psychic who can spy on others with astral projection (out-of-body travel). This literary felony is compounded by all the information thus gathered only proving that everyone in the manor house had a motive. No sign of Raffles though, and the butler didn't do it.

The second volume in the Hosier series is **Murder, Mrs. Hudson** (1997). By this time, Violet Warner is sharing digs with Mrs. Hudson. Their client this time is a young reporter named Winston Churchill, who wants them to maintain surveillance on an international criminal named Marcos. Churchill soon exits stage right, having gone off to the Boer War and gotten himself taken prisoner. He advised Mrs. Hudson to check in with his newspaper friend Miles Henten. There are two murders, one of whom was a mistake because the culprit thought the victim was Mrs. Hudson. The two biddies discover that Marcos is going to do another Guy Fawkes in support of the Boers. -15-

They rush off to inform Inspector Lestrade, who finds their tale too incredible not to believe, and Marcos is stopped in the nick of time. In the epilogue, Henten is found not to be who he claims he is, and abruptly departs this world by breaking his neck in a fall down the Scotland Yard staircase. That's the police story and they're sticking to it. I was mildly surprised Hosier didn't have him defenestrated. Once again, though, Mrs. Warner does a bit of astral projection, an annoying and unnecessary elaboration of the plot. She also is developed as a boorish blabbermouth, given to blurting the wrong thing at the wrong moment or getting hysterical like some movie heroine.

By the third volume, **Most Baffling, Mrs. Hudson** (1998), her reputation as a detective is spreading. Edgar Bramwell, prominent company executive, was part of a social group hypnotized by a mesmerist, the Great Zambini, at a house party. Edgar woke up dead from a bullet to the chest, and no one else in the group remembers a thing after waking up from the trance. Hudson and Warner are hired by the widow, and interrogate the group, all of whom have something to hide. Since the unknown mesmerist (unknown to the lady detectives and Scotland Yard) eradicated the memories of the group about the murder, Hudson and Warner go looking for suspects in the hypnotism trade, and find one straightaway, the Great Zambini. In the usual tradition of mystery novels, he is shortly thereafter murdered by the real culprit. The ladies carry on, Hudson taking two steps forward by logical

deductions, and Warner making one step back because she can't keep her ****ing mouth shut. This leads me to wonder why Hudson tolerates her presence. There is a traditional denouement with the Usual Suspects gathered in the drawing room of the manor house and a re-enactment for the benefit of Scotland Yard, followed by a shout of "J'Accuse!" and the murderer confessing. It was ever thus. -16-

The fourth and last Hosier novel I have is **The Game's Afoot, Mrs. Hudson** (1998) in which the two ladies have decided on a nice vacation in Brighton. They stay at one of the cheaper rooming houses, whose landlord regales them with a story about the capture of a jewel thief staying there a decade ago. There is an added bonus of ghosts about the premises. But soon one of the other guests suddenly departs this life more abruptly than he intended. After a couple dozen pages of padding, during which Hudson and Warner speculate about who the murderer might be, the second murder (there is always a second murder) then occurs. In this novel, Warner is slightly less offensive than usual. The jewel thief, long dead and gone, had hidden a rare gem in the attic, and Hudson finds it about ten seconds before the murderer. She survives the encounter, and the matter is soon resolved by the Brighton police, who are motivated mainly by a desire to be one up on Scotland Yard.

[to be continued]