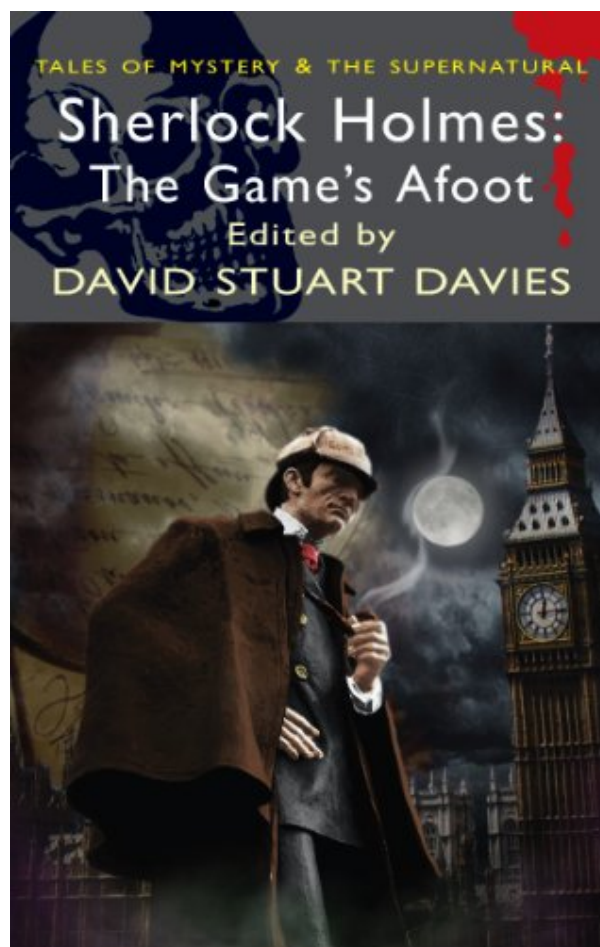
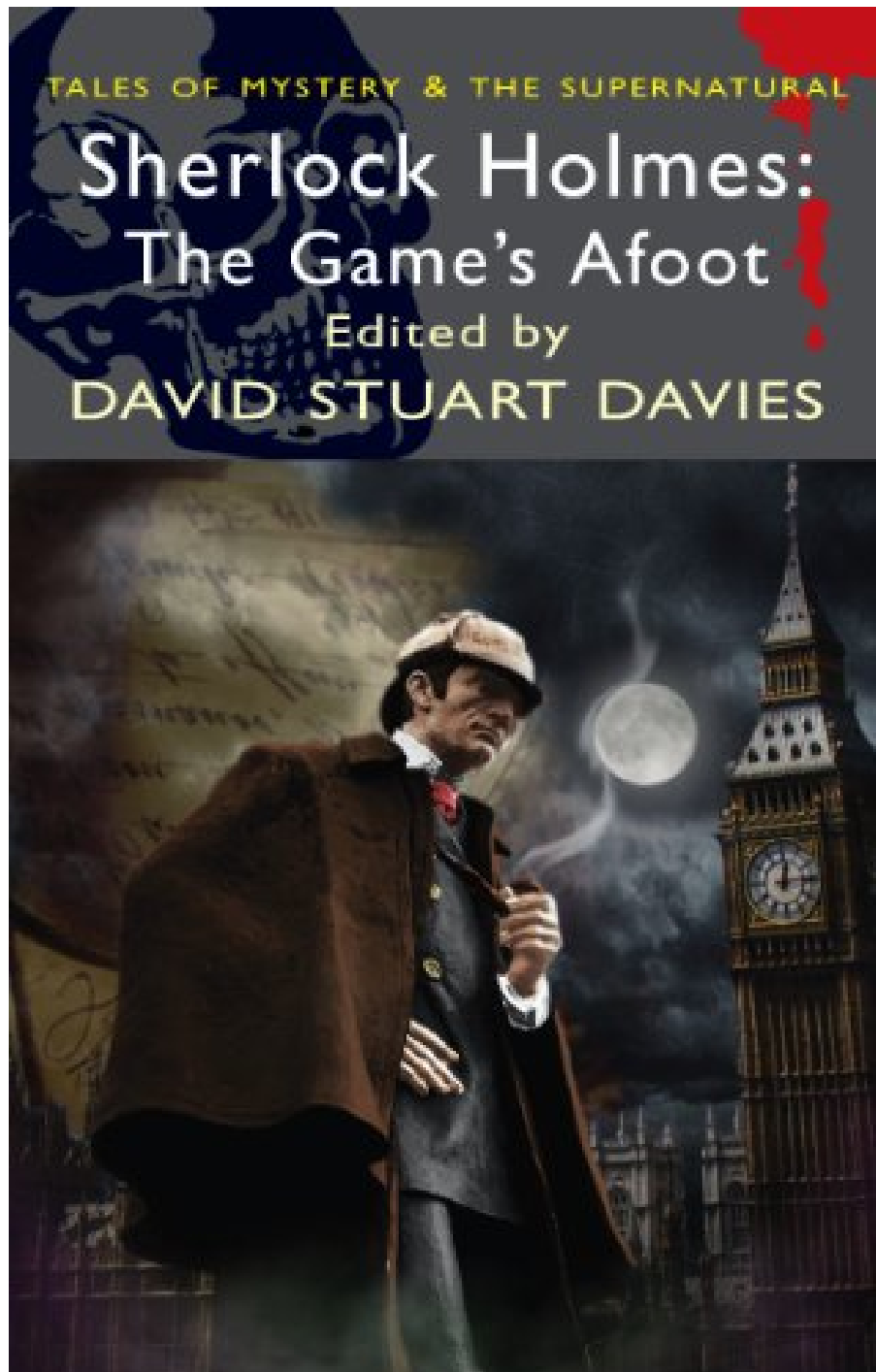


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Once more, the game's afoot as Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street returns in twenty new adventures specially commissioned for Wordsworth's Mystery & Supernatural series. The celebrated detective, along with his friend and biographer, Dr Watson, investigate a variety of baffling mysteries that will delight fans of the famous sleuth. Striding through the foggy gas lit streets of London, Holmes tackles such cases as the puzzle of the Green Skull, the secret of the Brown Box, the conundrum of the Dragon of Lea Lane, as well as coming face to face once again with the Sussex Vampire. We also learn what really happened at the Reichenbach Falls when Holmes had his fateful encounter with Professor Moriarty. David Stuart Davies, Denis O. Smith, Mark Valentine, Matthew Booth, M.J. Elliott and the other talented writers who have contributed to this collection have followed closely in the footsteps of Arthur Conan Doyle in creating a wonderful feast of Sherlockian entertainment.

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- Dimensions: 1.00" h x 5.00" w x 7.60" l, .60 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 416 pages

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**A BOOK WITH SERIOUS QUALITY-CONTROL PROBLEMS**

By David R. Eastwood

When I was twelve years old (more than five and a half decades ago), I joyfully read every one of the original Sherlock Holmes novels and stories by Conan Doyle. Since that time, I have reread about half of them and have read over two hundred Holmes parodies and pastiches written by others. At present, there are over a dozen anthologies of Holmes pastiches available, and I am sorry to report that **SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE GAME'S AFOOT**, edited by David Stuart Davies, is one of the most disappointing of these (two of its stories receiving a letter grade of "A" from me, four getting a "B," six a "C," another six a "D," and two earning a solid "F").

While a parody tries to amuse readers with humorous mockery and succeeds by being deliberately excessive or deliberately defective in one or more of its elements, a pastiche aims to please readers by replicating the chief effects of some enjoyable original work by closely mimicking all or most of its original elements. A successful Holmes pastiche typically must contain (1) an interesting and reasonably plausible problem or puzzle, which is solved in an interesting and reasonably plausible manner by Holmes, (2) characters that are interesting and plausible in the ways they speak and act, especially when they are the original ones invented and used by Conan Doyle, (3) a narrative style that closely approximates the vocabulary and sentence

structures of Conan Doyle's stories, (4) settings that are historically and geographically accurate, and (5) an attention to details so that no errors of grammar, word usage, or fact exist that are not easily blamed on Doctor Watson's ineptness. As for the specific discussions that follow, I have avoided giving away any author's plot details or secrets (even stupid ones), and I have not attempted to mention all of the good or bad features of any of the stories.

Of the twenty pastiches in this anthology, only two struck me as very good: "The Long Man" by Rafe McGregor (which, atypically, is narrated by an outsider) and "Jerusalem Keep" by Mark Valentine and John Howard (which involves no crime but has a noble and heartwarming conclusion). Four other pastiches deserved to be rated as good, having few shortcomings with respect to the criteria listed above: "The Adventure of the Green Skull" by Mark Valentine (which deals touchingly with an industrial disease), "The Tragedy of Saxon's Gate" by Matthew Booth (which has a good puzzle with reasonable clues), "The Adventure of the Haunted Showman" by Christopher Sequeira (clever, despite a couple of careless errors involving characters' names), and "Sherlock Holmes and the Reichenbach Secret" by David Stuart Davies, the book's editor (which lacks a puzzle but skillfully adds a new twist to Holmes's life story and image).

Six other pastiches seemed to be just "so-so" for various reasons: "The Adventure of the Forgetful Assassin" and "The Adventure of the Hanging Tyrant" by M. J. Elliott (the latter verges sometimes on parody and contains the error that Freud was born in Germany rather than Austria), "The Adventure of the Brown Box" and "The North Walk Mystery" by Denis O. Smith (the former contains a good puzzle but a very poorly presented solution), "The Adventure of the Intermittent Jigsaw Puzzle" by Alan Stockwell (which seems to contain a few dashes of parody), and "The Return of the Sussex Vampire" by Christopher Sequeira (which includes many interesting ideas about Watson's later life). All of these have serious quality-control problems, and their good elements are undercut by weak or faulty ones.

Six more pastiches struck me as "poor," and two others seemed downright "terrible." The worst two were "The Adventure of the Richmond Horror" by Denis O. Smith and "The Adventure of the Christmas Bauble" by John Hall. Smith's story is full of plot holes and factual inaccuracies and is ludicrous on many levels, while Hall's is a silly piece with lame jokes, a solution pulled from the air, and a criminal who escapes. Barely better are "The Adventure of the Whitrow Inheritance" (which employs a plot gimmick previously used in Holmes pastiches by Edward D. Hoch and Stewart Kaminsky)\* and "Sherlock Holmes and the Ghost of Christmas Past" (involving dubious Freudian analysis and a preposterously instantaneous cure) by David Stuart Davies, "The Case of the Gustafsson Stone" (which contains numerous errors and depends too heavily on luck for its resolution) and "The Case of the Vanishing Barque" by June Thomson (a lame and boring story that is resolved by an illegal trick on Holmes's part), "The Disappearance of the Cutter ALICIA" by John Hall (which is bland, almost dull, and depends on improbable luck for its solution), and "The Dragon of Lea Lane" by Michael Booth (which includes a dying man's words, which would help nobody identify his killer, and a solution that depends on a preposterous back-story that is researched privately by Holmes and concealed from Watson--and us--until nearly the ending).

Aside from the unevenness of the quality of the selections, there are traces of carelessness in the production of the book. Its table of contents will annoy most readers, because it lists stories' titles but not their authors (I penned all the authors' names into my own copy). The Introduction by Davies is intelligent and informative, but it states that brief biographies of the authors are at the back of the book, whereas they actually begin on the very next page. Finally, proofreading of the texts has been cursory: a few spelling errors occur, as well as a large number of punctuation errors, chiefly involving omitted quotation marks.

\* POSTSCRIPT (Oct. 2010): After further thought & reading, it now seems to me that the plot gimmick in question was first invented by Anthony Wynne in "The Gold of Tso-fu" (1926) and then either borrowed or

re-invented by Agatha Christie in "The Dream" (1937), where Poirot is brought in by two killers-to-be to serve as an expert witness to their bogus hocus-pocus. Others who used this plot gimmick for Holmes (or the wannabe Solar Pons) include August Derleth ("The Adventure of the Frightened Baronet," 1945), Ronald A. Knox ("The Adventure of the First-Class Carriage," 1947), Edward Hoch ("The Return of the Speckled Band," 1987), Stewart Kaminsky ("The Man from Capetown," 2001), and David Stuart Davies ("The Adventure of the Whitrow Inheritance" in this present book). In view of Agatha Christie's huge popularity, it seems very probable that at least 3 or 4 of these men "borrowed" this plot gimmick from her.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

It's 1895 again.

By Philip K. Jones

This collection is described by the editor as "... a new batch of twenty adventures ... to fascinate and entertain you." The recent appearances of several assemblages of Sherlockian tales constructed around one theme or another have tended to jade the palates of Sherlockians for specialized sorts of mysteries. Without citing any particular example, I have noted, and reviewed, a number of specialized collections in recent times to the point that the appearance of a solid 'clump' of Sherlockian entertainment is a welcome arrival. Unfortunately, the Publisher has not seen fit to include credits for earlier publications of many of the included items.

The tales published here for the first time include two well executed stories by Matthew Booth, "The Tragedy of Saxon's Gate" and "The Dragon of Lea Lane." One of three included by the editor, his "The Adventure of the Whitrow inheritance," introduces a particularly cheeky villain. A new effort by M. J. Elliot, "The Adventure of the Forgetful Assassin," describes a new and unique murder weapon. Rafe McGregor's "The Long Man" is a chilling echo of a real-life occurrence. Two new tales by Christopher Sequeira. "The Return of the Sussex Vampire" And "The Adventure of the Haunted Showman," both point up the effect of Watson's story telling on Holmes' practice. The single new entry of three by Denis O. Smith, "The Adventure of the Brown Box," is a classic Sherlockian tale. Two efforts by Mark Valentine complete the list of new tales, "The Adventure of the Green Skull" highlights one of the horrors of Nineteenth Century Industrialism and, "Jerusalem Keep," written with the help of John Howard, employs Sherlock Holmes, Antiquarian, as an expert witness in a unique court.

Old favorites reprinted here include a selection of hard-to-get items. Two by Davies, "Sherlock Holmes and the Ghost of Christmas Past," from *The Strand*, and "Sherlock Holmes and the Reichenbach Secret" from *Sherlock* magazine, have only been available in old magazines. Now Mr. Gulli, of *The Strand*, and Mr. Davies, of *Sherlock*, no doubt have copies available, but they are hard for the rest of us to find. M. J. Elliot's "The Adventure of the Hanging Tyrant" appeared in *Curious Incidents II* and John Hall's "The Adventure of the Christmas Bauble" was only to be found in another back issue of *Sherlock Magazine*. On the other hand, his "The Disappearance of the Cutter Alicia" appeared first in *The Shoso-In Bulletin* and was later reprinted in *The Strand Magazine*.

Denis O. Smith's "The North Walk Mystery" and "The Adventure of the Richmond Horror" both appeared in editions of *Sherlock Magazine*, but 'North Walk' was also published in Volume 4 of Smith's *Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes*. Allen Stockwell's "The Adventure of the Intermittent Jig-Saw Puzzle" originally appeared in the second edition of his *The Singular Adventures of Mr. Sherlock Holmes*, but not in the first. In addition, there it was titled simply "The Intermittent Jig-Saw Puzzle." Both of June Thomson's tales, "The Case of the Vanishing Barque" and "The Case of the Gustafsson Stone," originally appeared in her *The Secret Notebooks of Sherlock Holmes*.

I believe we may conclude that the editor has succeeded in his goal

Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones; April, 2008.

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enjoyed it very much

By TOM K.

Interesting take on Sherlock, enjoyed it very much, worth a read if you are a new or old fan!

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