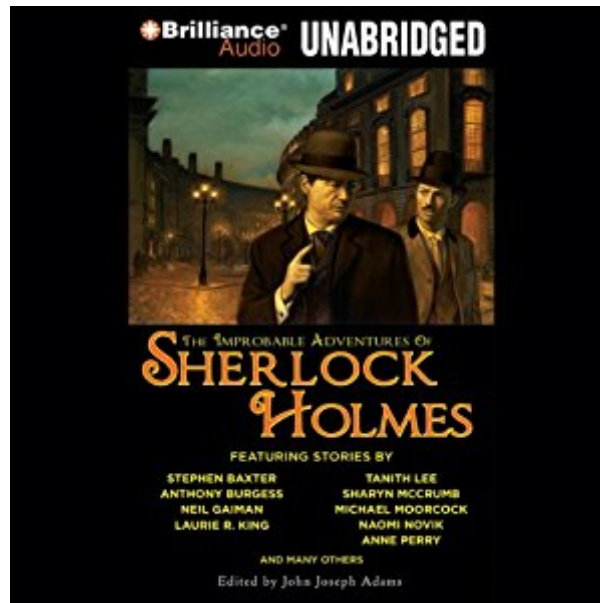




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The Improbable Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

This huge anthology mixes tales of traditional mystery with tales that introduce elements of sci fi and fantasy. While a couple of the tales are honest attempts at pastiche, most of these pick up Arthur Conan Doyle's (ACD's) characters and use them in ways he surely never envisioned which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but which Holmes fans may find off-putting. For their benefit, I'm including here a brief summary of each story, to enable them to decide for themselves whether this is worthwhile. As it happens, there's no need to worry about spoilers because the intro to each story takes care of that; I think the editor was worried that the stories wouldn't be appreciated without context, but his intros do tend to spoil any surprises to come.

1. Stephen King's The Doctor's Case (mystery), in which Watson beats Holmes to the solution, is probably the most authentic tale in the story, offering a novel solution to the venerable "locked room" conundrum.
2. Lebbon's The Horror of the Many Faces (fantasy/horror/sci-fi) presents us with Holmes the murderer. An intriguing premise, but the vague denouement fails to deliver on the tale's promise.
3. Anne Perry's The Case of The Bloodless Sock (mystery) features Moriarty becoming personally involved in the kidnapping of a young girl. The denouement is clever enough, but purists will find this story irksome, as Moriarty committing his own crimes is as antithetical to the canon as Mycroft running a marathon.
4. Sinor's The Adventure of the Other Detective (fantasy) is an alternative universe tale in which everyone in the canon swaps roles and Jack the Ripper is revealed to be ***. Not a bad tale, though one could wish Sinor had given the characters a more mysterious mystery to solve.
5. Hoch's A Scandal in Montreal (mystery) gives us Holmes traveling to Canada at Irene Adler's request to help extract her son from peril. Sadly, this Irene channels little of her former spunk and the denouement relies on a rather cheesy "5 Minute Mystery"-type clue. Disappointing on multiple levels.
6. McIntyre's The Adventure of the Field Theorem (mystery) presents us with ACD himself calling in Holmes to investigate local crop circles. A rather charming little story that plays on ACD's notorious gullibility with respect to supernatural

entities.7. In Schweitzer's *The Adventure of the Death-Fetch* (horror/fantasy), a man fears that past wrong-doings have returned to destroy him. Call me a purist, but I can't help considering stories that rely on supernatural explanations to be cop-outs. Kind of like the Scooby Gang finding out the that Green Ghost really was a ghost.8. In Kowal's *The Shocking Affair of the Dutch Steamship Friesland* (mystery), a member of the Italian government is assassinated by ingenious means aboard a steamship. Loved the ingenious means, hated the rushed, cluttered storytelling9. Jeffers' *The Adventure of the Mummy's Curse* (mystery) - need I say more? Not a bad tale, but I can't help considering it "cheating" when the author doesn't give you all the info you need to solve the case.10. In Roden's *The Things That Shall Come Upon Them* (mystery, fantasy/horror), Holmes works in tandem with a "detective of the supernatural" to determine the root cause of strange happenings at a haunted house. Rather enjoyed this one.11. In Anthony Burgess's *Murder to Music* (mystery), music serves as the clue that reveals the murderer. Again, however, Burgess cheats a little by not revealing key info, and some of Holmes' deductions are based more on luck than evidence. Still, Anthony Burgess!12. In Baxter's *The Adventure of the Inertial Adjustor* (mystery), the inventor of a mechanism that can supposedly "suspend gravity" is found dead. Love that science provides the critical clue in this one.13. Laurie King's *Mrs. Hudson's Case* (mystery) gives us Mrs. Hudson solving not one but two mysteries, bringing to the business an empathy that her more famous employer is known to lack. Highly satisfying tale.14. Landis' *The Singular Habits of Wasps* (mystery, horror), yet another re-examination the Jack the Ripper case, delivers a wholly unexpected and imaginative twist to the old tale.15. Myers' *The Affair of the 46th Birthday* (mystery), in which Holmes solves the murder of an Italian secretary, depends on the possession of several bits of obscure historical trivia for its revelation.16. Peter Tremayne's *The Specter of Tullyfane Abbey* (mystery) presents us with a young Sherlock Holmes, on break from university, presented with a mysterious disappearance to solve. Between trying to fill in details about Holmes' family, supplying him with a love interest, and dragging in Moriarty, Tremayne's juggling a lot of balls in this one, but it (mostly) works.17. Sharyn McCrumb's *The Vale of the White Horse* (mystery) sets Holmes to solving the murder of a peer at Uffington's legendary White Horse. However, her interjection of a folklore-spouting wise-woman as the tale's narrator feels forced and doesn't quite work.18. Michael Moorcock's *The Adventure of the Dorset Street Lodger* (mystery) is one of the few tales in which the author's narrative style distracts from the tale. Moreover, the convoluted plot involving a naïf Texan, a Fellini statue, and an old man in the care of a mysterious nurse comes off as preposterous rather than clever.19. Green's *The Adventure of the Lost World* (mystery, fantasy) is a tongue-in-cheek ode to AC D&A's only slightly lesser known claim to fame, *Voyage to the*

Center of the Earth. The plot is entirely ridiculous, even within the forgiving constraints of fantasy, and yet, somehow, it works.²⁰ Hambly's *The Adventure of the Antiquarian's Niece* (fantasy) features a cameo by Cthulhu and references to other works of pulp horror from the Lovecraft era. Some technical writing issues (I swear parts of this are told in first person omniscient, which I don't think is a real thing), but not a bad Lovecraftian tale that just happens to include Holmes and Watson²¹ Yet another celebrity cameo in Pi's *Dynamics of a Hanging* (mystery), this time Charles Dodgson aka Lewis Carroll in a tale that features Moriarty murdering his old college pal ACD. Carroll, a rather brilliant mathematician when he wasn't writing *Alice in Wonderland*, is brought in to decode Moriarty's journals.²² Roberson's *Merridew of Abominable Memory* (mystery) elaborates on one of the many cryptic references to cases with which Watson was wont to pepper the introduction to his tales. The tale's unnecessary subplot doesn't distract from a chilling and memorable denouement.²³ Naomi Novik's *Commonplaces* (romance?) is a thankfully brief tale that feels more like something you'd find on a fan fiction site than in an anthology. Why must authors insist on burdening poor Holmes with a love interest, male and/or female?²⁴ Rogers' *The Adventure of the Pirates of Devil's Cape* (mystery) achieves preposterous without resorting to fantasy/scifi elements, but in an over-the-top pulpy way that is hard to hate. Seriously, a Marie Celeste-type maritime mystery, sharp-shooting Siamese twins, and Holmes crossing swords with a pirate king - all in one short story?²⁵ Valentine's *The Adventure of the Green Skull* (mystery) starts off sounding like something out of Scooby Doo, but the resolution is refreshingly creative, and served with a tasty side of historical context.²⁶ Tanith Lee's *The Human Mystery* (mystery) offers more red herrings than a Russian fishing trawler on its way to an ending that is perhaps a little more Freudian than Holmsian. Not terribly bad, but not terribly clever either.²⁷ Neil Gaiman's *Study in Emerald* (mystery, scifi/fantasy) is fittingly saved for last, as it combines elements of mystery, scifi and fantasy. The tale deliberately references ACD's *A Study in Scarlet* and transforms the essential elements of this foundational Holmes tale in ways that I think even ACD might have enjoyed.²⁸ And then there's Sawyer's *You See But You Do Not Observe* (philosophy?), in which the Great Detective endeavors to solve the great Fermi Paradox. If you've heard the old chestnut about the philosopher who committed suicide by convincing himself he didn't exist, you've got an idea of how this one ends.

I loved this collection of 28 stories, all done in homage to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his famous

characters Holmes and Watson. Most are narrated in first person by Watson, as were Conan Doyle's stories; the few that are not do not suffer for that reason. The fantasy/science-fiction stories are true to the original spirit, as are the ones based in straight mystery. Some are set during the period of Holmes' actual career, often explained by Watson as stories that were not told earlier for various reasons. Before reading this collection, I'd read only a couple of the "real" tales of Sherlock Holmes; now I'm reading an actual collection of the original 46 stories about him and, I think, am liking them even more because of this unusual introduction to the detective and his Boswell. I read the Kindle edition of this collection and wish it contained a table of contents so that I could easily go back to stories I want to reread, but it does not. Oh, well.... I DO want to reread some of them -- they're that good.

There have been innumerable Sherlock Holmes theme compendiums out there, and most of them have been "one trick ponies" with 2 or 3 good stories in them combined with many lame and / or inept pieces padding things out. The talented anthologist Mr. Adams has cherry picked what would generally be considered the finest pieces from various themed anthologies and presented a uniformly excellent mix herein. Three caveats: first, not all stories necessarily feature SF, fantasy, or horror elements. Some stories start out with seemingly paranormal events that are eventually explained (a la "straight up" Conan Doyle... or Scooby Doo!) and some are "merely" conventional mysteries. All are credibly written, and the variety makes things reasonably interesting. Anthologies of entirely supernatural Holmesian themes can quickly grate on the reader (e.g. "Shadows Over Baker Street") and the Adams approach is a better solution. Second, though there is a brief "intro to Holmes" article kicking things off, if you are unfamiliar and / or hostile to Holmes and his typical literary appearances, this book will do little to enlighten you or change your mind. Adams suggests one can use this volume as an intro to Holmes, but realistically this would be a stretch. If you've never read Conan Doyle at all, start there first and then come here. Third, as with the original stories, you can't read these in big sequential chunks. Read one or two then come back a few days later and read some more. If you read them all back to back, you will find characters and details blurring into one big mess. Follow a course of moderation and you will enjoy this anthology more. Assuming you are not taking this book to a brief desert island stay, this should not be a problem for most. As with any anthology, you may personally loathe some stories (Valentine for me), feel others are too long (IMO the Baxter piece here) and may feel others are just right (for me Hambly, Gaiman, King). All in all, lots of great pieces here, few bombs, and admirable editorial discretion shown by Mr. Adams. If you like Holmes and would like to see him explore some new ground, I think you will enjoy

this book very much. Novices to the Baker Street world and Holmes-ophobes need not apply.

Some of the stories are fantastic but others are not. There are a couple of stories that have no resolution, which drives me batty. I'm not sure if it was intentional or if the stories are part of a larger book. I really like some of the twists and turns some of the authors took. It took me a really long time to read this because for every story I couldn't get enough of there would be 2-3 that I found to be slow and boring. I would recommend the book for fans of Sherlock Holmes, since most fans can't get enough of the character and it is worth the read for those hidden gems.

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