



The Solar Pons Gazette

W W W . S O L A R P O N S . C O M



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AUGUST DERLETH & SOLAR PONS: WHO NEEDS A HARD BOILED DETECTIVE?

BY BOB BYRNE

THIS ESSAY ORIGINALLY APPEARED AS A GUEST COLUMN ON THE CRIMINAL BRIEF MYSTERY BLOG

It's quite possible that you aren't familiar with Solar Pons, the 'Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street.' If that is so, a quick viewing of the [Solar Pons FAQ](#) page might help. And if you're thinking Solar Pons is nothing more than a tired copy of the Baker Street sleuth, the first essay in the first issue of [The Solar Pons Gazette](#) might change your mind.

Welcome back. So, August Derleth was a born and raised Wisconsin boy, enamored with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of the great Sherlock Holmes. He wasn't much different than an awful lot of American youths in the nineteen twenties. Except, the enterprising Derleth wrote to the author and asked if there would be any more stories, and if not, could he write some himself. Doyle, not the friendliest person in regards to his meal ticket, did have the courtesy to send back a reply, denying Derleth permission to continue the adventures.

Not discouraged at all, the nineteen year-old University of Wisconsin student made a note on his calendar, 'In re: Sherlock Holmes', as a reminder to write a story in imitation of Doyle's creation. The date is lost in the mists of time, but August Derleth did in fact sit down and produce *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus* in one afternoon, starring Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker. It appeared in the February, 1929 edition of *Dragnet* and Derleth would produce over seventy more tales before passing away in 1973. British author Basil Copper added over two dozen more Pons stories with the blessing of Derleth's Estate.

Derleth's Pons stories received praise and support from noted Holmes fans like Edgar Wallace, Vincent Starrett, Anthony Boucher and the cousins jointly known as Ellery Queen. And it's safe to say that quite a few of today's Sherlock Holmes readers are familiar with and enjoy Solar Pons. However, Pons is not a major (cont on page 2)

August Derleth & Solar Pons

(cont. from page 1)

character in the the history of detective literature, nor are the books best sellers. But one unique aspect of the series, worthy of mention, is that Derleth was going against type.

As I stated in my essay, [Hard Boiled Holmes](#), "The era of British detective fiction between the two World Wars is known as The Golden Age. This was the time of the country cozy and the locked room mystery." Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Morrison were replaced by Lord Peter Wimsey and Miss Marple. In America, Carroll John Daly, Raoul Whitfield, Dashiell Hammett and others were countering with the hard boiled school, in style far more than just an ocean away from the British mystery story.

But Derleth chose to create a new detective that wasn't a part of either school. Because of his love for the Sherlock Holmes stories, he spent the next fortyish years periodically writing stories that, while set in a London where cars had replaced hansom cabs, immediately called to mind 221B Baker Street and all that went with it.

The start of the hard boiled school can be definitely traced to April and May of 1923 when *Black Mask* contained Carroll John Daly stories featuring, first, Three Gun Terry Mack and then the longer-lasting Race Williams. By the time Solar Pons made his first appearance, a fellow named Dashiell Hammett had published almost three dozen Continental Op stories in *Black Mask*. Heck, Sam Spade and Solar Pons both came into print in 1929. Hard to picture them solving a case together!

In 1934, Rex Stout introduced Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin, a pair that blended the hard boiled private eye with the armchair genius best personified by Mycroft Holmes. Stout was a well known Sherlockian and the Holmes stories exerted a great influence on the Wolfe books, which remain popular today. However, Stout was astute enough to know that pulp magazines set the style of American detective fiction and Wolfe and Goodwin very much read like contemporary mysteries, not throwbacks to gas lit London.

But Derleth continued to write new Pons tales while the British Golden Age came to an end and the pulp magazines fell by the wayside. Pons was a hobby that he indulged in out of affection for his boyhood idol, Sherlock Holmes. He wasn't compelled to create a tough private eye or a gentleman thief to meet the demands of mystery readers. Brett Halliday and Michael Shayne; Raymond Chandler and Philip Marlowe; John D. MacDonald and Travis McGee; Ross MacDonald and Lew Archer: just a few of the popular detectives that American readers gobbled up while August Derleth kept writing about Sherlock Holmes' successor.

Solar Pons was a return to the earlier days of detective fiction at a time when his peers had left that era behind. Fortunately, August Derleth was a fine writer and the Holmes fan who has not yet discovered Solar Pons has a treasure chest ready to be opened.

GREETINGS FROM PRAED STREET



It's been five years, but it appears that Solar Pons has once again hung out his shingle at 7B Praed Street. After a long break from the works of August Derleth, I've returned to the deerstalkered demesne of the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street. I kick it off with my second 'introductory' essay on Pons.

To go with a redesigned and expanded website, (to be launched soon), we've got Case Commentaries for *The Norcross Riddle*, *The Lost Locomotive* and *The Seven Passengers*. And speaking of *The Lost Locomotive*, we've got a brand new piece of Ponsiana from Andrew Norris looking at that tale.

Last issue included a new Pons pastiche from Andrew; *Solar Pons' War of the Worlds*. Well, how about another new one in this issue? Enjoy *The Adventure of the Aspiring Animator*, featuring a certain nefarious Baron.

In *Solar Pons & Sarob(bery) Press*, I rant a bit about the ridiculous prices for a copy of Basil Copper's *Solar Pons & the Devil's Claw*. And another essay from the old Pontine Dossier is included; this one from legendary Sherlockian Chris Redmond.

The Literary Agent, August Derleth published three excerpts from Dr. Parker's Notebooks. I've published two further entries in prior Gazettes. And here's the sixth installment. Written before he started chronicling Pons' cases, see what the good doctor had to say about a famous American murder case;. Also, a vague reference to a shared

adventure with Sherlock Holmes provides the clay for a new essay on Pons, Holmes and Cthulhu, coming up in the summer issue of the Gazette. And an undated excerpt gives us a never before told adventure: it may well be Parker's second attempt to chronicle a Pons case!

Speaking of Cthulhu, one of the most in depth Ponsian essays I've ever read, *Solar Pons and the Cthulhu Mythos* is reprinted in this issue.

And we dust off a piece by Sherlockian Chris Redmond from *The Pontine Dossier*.



Derleth created the Mycroft & Moran label for his Solar Pons books. It was a part of his Arkham House imprint. The names are for Mycroft Holmes (Sherlock's older brother) & Sebastian Moran (the second most dangerous man in London).

FEATURED CASE

(WWW . SOLAR PONS . COM)

The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle-NORC***The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes, 1944******"In Re: Sherlock Holmes": The Adventures of Solar Pons, 1945***

Date - Mid April, 1928

The Case

Benjamin Harrison Manton of Norcross Towers is married to the formerly widowed Lady McFallon, whose husband disappeared in the fens at Norcross. Manton's wife begins acting strangely at the same time that she tells him that she has rented out a ruined abbey on the property to a psychiatrist with a lunatic and his assistant. Manton approaches Pons after she asks him for one thousand pounds and then makes another request for five thousand pound, refusing to explain. Pons believes that someone may be blackmailing her and travels with Parker to Norcross Towers to uncover the truth.

Quotes

- Pons: *The science of deduction rests primarily on the faculty of observation.*
- Parker: *What do you make of it? I replied, somewhat nettled.*

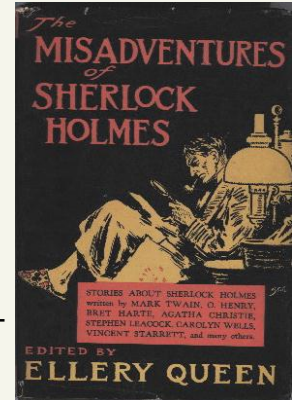
Pons: *Oh little more...except that the gentleman is an American by birth, but has resided in England for some length of time; he is a man of independent means, and is between thirty-five and thirty-nine years of age. Furthermore, his ancestry is very probably Southern United States, but his parents were undoubtedly members of the American Republican political party*

Comments

- *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle* holds an important place in the Pontine Canon. *The Adventure of the Black Cardinal* had

appeared in *Gangster Stories* in December of 1930. *The Norcross Riddle*, likely written in 1930, had sat on the shelf along with several other Pons stories written but never published.

In 1944, Ellery Queen was putting together the wonderfully conceived but ill-fated collection, *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Derleth touched up Norcross and submitted it: Holmes enthusiasts applauded. Vincent Starrett and Fred Dannay (with Manfred B. Lee, half of Ellery Queen) learned that Derleth had several more tales and urged him to put out a collection of the Pons adventures in book form.



One year later, on Derleth's own Mycroft & Moran imprint, *In Re: Sherlock Holmes* was published. Pons had been absent for fourteen years, but new adventures and jottings from Dr. Parker's pen would be published right up until August Derleth's death in 1971. *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle* brought Pons back from the dustbin and needs be accorded the greatest respect.

Ø Readers of Sherlock Holmes certainly found this case to be reminiscent of *The Adventure of the Yellow Face*, with the abandoned structure on the property mysteriously leased out by the wife. The wife's asking for large sums of money without giving any explanation also calls to mind *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*.

➤ The above-quoted exchange between Parker and Pons takes place as this case opens. Parker has made a few minor observations regarding Benjamin Harrison Manton's business card and Pons responds with his impressive list of deductions. He then explains the chain of inferences that led to his observations, an exasperated Parker finally conceding defeat at the end.

It is a classic scene from the stories and is often listed as a favorite passage featuring Pons showcasing his talents.

- Luther Norris, founder of the Praed Street Irregulars, ranked *The Norcross Riddle* as his favorite Pons tale.
- Parker has a shining moment at the end of the story when he is re-examining Pons' explanation of the affair and makes an astute deduction.
- Pons has arranged for the villains to be arrested by Jamison at Dover. It is unclear how Blanton could be kept ignorant of the true state of affairs once they are put to trial. Of course, one has to assume that Blanton would eventually read Parker's chronicle of the affair since his is Pons' client and the name of his home is included in the title.



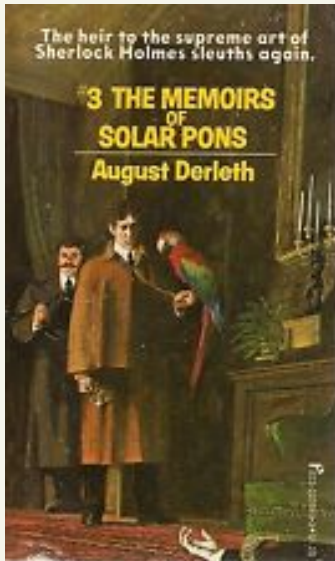
An original illustration by Frank Utpatel for *The Norcross Riddle*



The Pontine Dossier was the *Baker Street Journal* of the Praed Street Irregulars. The first issue was published in 1967 with the final appearing in 1977, for a total of fifteen issues, covering 168 pages. One of the reasons I publish *The Solar Pons Gazette* is to provide a forum for writings on and promotion of Solar Pons, filling the gap left by the *Dossier*. You are reading the sixth issue of the *Gazette*, so far providing 191 pages of Pons-related miscellanea!

FOREWORD:
THE MEMOIRS OF SOLAR PONS
BY LUTHER NORRIS (1975)

One does not have to be a mystery buff to recognize that in the annals of detective lore none has been so widely imitated (and so widely abused) as the master of them all, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. This growing parade of pastiche detectives includes such outlandish names as Sherlock Abodes, Thinlock Bones, Shamrock Jones, Sheerluck Ohms, Picklock Holmes, and Fu-erh-his (the hon-



orable or obviously dishonorable Chinese interpretation). Anyone worth his deerstalker will, however, probably agree that perhaps the best and most widely read is Solar Pons.

August Derleth once told me that “Pons and Holmes are as alike as two peas in a pod.” This may be true to some extent but it is the difference between Pons and Holmes that commands attention – plus the fact that the Pons stories stand up on their own merit. The very name itself, Solar Pons, shows the desire of the late Wisconsin author to show individuality. Again, the true spirit of the Holmes canon is maintained in the Pontical tales.

Holmes, as we know, is an accomplished violinist, often interrupting an investigation to attend a concert or play his violin. Among the varied “interests” of Solar Pons we find that he has an

“addiction to good music of all kinds” indicating that he is apparently an auditor rather than a true performer or musicologist. Even his friend and associate, Dr. Parker, states that he has occasion to complain about Pons’ “infernal scratching of the violin.”

In Solar Pons we find a widely traveled man with headquarters not only in Praed Street, London, but also in Paris, Vienna, Prague, Rome, Chicago and New York (possibly in a small street of Madison Avenue). Sherlock Holmes, as we know, does most of his sleuthing in England and occasionally in Scotland and France and his headquarters are located only in London. This can probably be explained by the differences in times in which the two famous detectives worked and lived. Holmes is a resident of Victorian England, while Pons does his ferreting in the early twentieth century. Since Pons worked a few decades later than Holmes, he has the advantage of better transportation (if you can believe your local travel agent) and this accounts for his widely distributed residence.

It would also seem that in order to maintain seven offices and travel to and from them Solar Pons, must from sheer necessity, charge higher fees than Holmes. We can assume from the rather grubby appearance of Praed Street in comparison with Baker Street that Pons does not maintain quarters in the high-rent districts of the cities mentioned. Reimbursement for just his expenses as in the case of Holmes, would hardly allow him to make ends meet or pass out a handful of guineas to his Irregulars instead of a shilling

as Holmes does.

Another striking difference between the two detectives exists in their attitudes towards their colleagues, Drs. Watson and Parker. While Holmes and Pons both find a source of amusement in their colleagues' poor attempts at deduction, Pons is at times a little too critical of his old companion, Dr. Parker, whereas Holmes is very understanding. Pons, though, seems to have a keener sense of humor, referring to Holmes (with a twinkle in his eye) as his "illustrious predecessor" and telling Parker that he (Pons) can now retire to Sussex to keep bees since Parker has learned his methods so well. As the Agent, Derleth, like Pons, often displayed a sly sense of humor by passing out calling cards engraved with the detective's name, London address, and private telephone number.

What August Derleth probably considered when he made comparisons between the two detectives was the very similarity of the stories themselves. A client seeks, the detective helps, the detective examines the scene of the crime, the detective investigates, and finally, the detective exposes the criminal and brings the culprit to book. Ratiocination, eh what! But thought he blueprints (or should I say footprints) are the same, here again Derleth differs from Doyle. Pons has some cases, such as "The Adventure of the Blind Clairaudient," which contain a note of the supernatural, while Holmes has no cases which are not "down to earth." The two written in collaboration with Mack Reynolds, "The Adventure of the Snitch in Time" and "The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus," both of which appear in *The Science Fic-*

tional Sherlock Holmes, are certainly are from being down to earth and provide delightful reading for the green cheese set.

Both Holmes and Pons are authors of many monographs. Those written by Holmes deal, for the most part, with subjects related to his detective work. In the case of Solar Pons, however, we find more varied interests. "An Inquiry into the Nannatal Ruins of Ponapae" and "An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others" are two examples, for instance, that show that Pons has more varied interests than Holmes. Holmes, as we know, has little concern for topics not related to his "little problems."

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of course, was a frequent visitor to the United States, while August Derleth never set forth in London or England. This no doubt accounts for the Americanisms that occur in the stories, although my old friend, Michael Harrison, did check many of the manuscripts before they appeared in print. Like Doyle, however, Derleth grew weary at times of his role as the agent, thinking that it deterred him from his more serious work. As he once said, "I can promise to do no more."

Although there are many differences between Pons and Holmes, there are also many similarities which help to show that Pons was born of Holmes. Both of the detectives had friends in the medical profession with whom they share quarters in London and who record their cases; both have brothers who possess the knack of pure deduction even better than they themselves, but because Mycroft Holmes and Bancroft Pons are not energetic enough to investigate for them-

selves, work for the Crown. Their methods are certainly much the same and they both have their own little band of street urchins who help them carry out their inquiries – Holmes the Baker Street Irregulars and Pons the Praed Street Irregulars.

Until now, *The Memoirs of Solar Pons* has been the most difficult book in the Pontine Canon to obtain – and the most sought after. Now, for a mere fraction of what the original Mycroft & Moran first edition would cost (if you can find it!), you can enjoy what I consider along with the late Vincent Starrett to be the finest collection of Solar Pons stories ever written. Ah, how I envy the new reader who has yet to meet Solar Pons of Praed Street.

Yes, the game's always afoot.

Luther Norris' foreword originally appeared in the Pinnacle paperback edition of 1975. Ellery Queen wrote the foreword for the original Mycroft & Moran edition in 1951.

A Toast to Solar Pons

by Robert W. Hahn

Raise a glass to Praed Street!
For by the Great Hound's molar,
If it be we can't have Sherlock,
By all means, let's have Solar!

This poem appeared in the 1977 Edition (Volume 3, Number 2) of *The Pontine Dossier*.

Www.SolarPons.com Being Redesigned

2014 will see a relaunch of the SolarPons.com website, which, at present, is basically just a place to park my free, online Pons and Holmes newsletters. However, the intent was always to write Case Commentaries, like the three found in this issue of *The Gazette*, for all of the August Derleth Pons stories. And hopefully, eventually, the Basil Copper tales as well.

I have worked behind the scenes towards this goal for some time. During 2014, I will be uploading Commentaries and short Summaries for every Derleth story, along with a few Pons sampler essays, making www.SolarPons.com hands down the internet's leading resource for the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street. After a lot more typing, every introduction to the original Mycroft and Moran and Pinnacle paperback reissues will also be available on the site.

And the summer of 2014 will see an all star issue of *The Gazette* with contributions from several different essayists, marking a renaissance in Ponsian scholarship.



Illustration by Frank McSherry

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI
BY BOB BYRNE

16 July, 1921

"Why, this is most fascinating, Pons," I said as I glanced over the top of the Times. Pons, removing a loose thread from his dressing gown, raised an eyebrow in reply.

Those two anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, have been sentenced to death in America."

My lodging mate seemed disinterested. "I cannot say that I have followed the case closely, Parker. It was the robbery of a shoe store payroll in Chicago, was it not? Hardly 'fascinating.'"

I grunted at his cavalier dismissal of my comment. "Well, if you have not followed the case, how would you know if what I have read is interesting or not, Pons? In spite of dozens of witnesses who testified on behalf of the pair, the court apparently relied on tests that showed that Sacco's gun was the murder weapon. The men were convicted and sentenced to death based on that evidence."

"So, our American cousins, who have been slow in adapting the new forensic sciences espoused by men like Spilsbury and that Smith fellow who was in Egypt, are finding that justice should not rely solely on human testimony? Good for them."

"Likely murdered those men so that they could use the money for their anarchic activities."

Pons smiled at me. "Perhaps, Parker, but do not ascribe motives based on emotion and prejudice. That is destructive to the deductive system. There are any number of reasons they apparently killed the men for their payroll boxes. Let us be pleased that the court found the scientific evidence strong enough to be trusted. There will always be a place for the human element in the justice system, lest we become a soulless tyranny. But facts and science are not as malleable and will help ensure that criminals are less likely to get away with their actions."

"So, you admit this was interesting."

"Touche, Parker. I deduced without sufficient facts and was proven wrong. We all must continually learn from our mistakes."

19, July, 1921

The warm summer had us lazing about our Praed Street lodgings, Pons having earlier turned down my desultory offer of a walk to the tobacconist's. Even his usually indefatigable energy level seemed sapped by the heat outside, though boredom from lack of work surely contributed to his lassitude. I cannot say what brought to mind my question to Pons, other than my subconscious looking for some topic to break the heavy silence; for we were not as comfortable with each other as fellow lodgers as we would become over the years.

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

"Pons, when I was commenting on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Cottingley Fairies article in *The Strand*, you said something like, 'The honored Sir Arthur should stick to his literary agent duties for the good Doctor Watson and stop espousing this fairy nonsense.'" Pons snorted in remembrance, nodding his head in agreement.

"Yes, how an otherwise intelligent man can be fooled by such photos and the imaginations of two young girls is beyond me." I wholeheartedly agreed.

"But in the course of that discussion, you mentioned some adventure that you had with Sherlock Holmes."

His face took on a grave countenance and the atmosphere of the room changed. "What little I said was too much, Parker. The world is not yet ready to learn of those events." He paused and stared fixedly at me. "I daresay that it may never be. I do not wish to speak of them." So saying, he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. I could not be certain, but for just the briefest instant, I thought that a look of horror passed over his face. It was gone almost before it may have appeared, but there was no doubt that whatever had brought Pons and Holmes together was no ordinary investigation.

22 July, 1921

I looked up from the paper, "Well, it does not appear that the Ulster Unionists will be returning to the talks." Pons shook his head in sadness.

Pons had been arranging papers on his less-cluttered-than normal desk and said without looking up, "I fear that the truce agreed to earlier this month, followed by such terrible riots, is only the official end to conflict. Bancroft agrees with me that passions will remain high for decades and lives will be lost."

"Surely you two are looking on the gloomy side of things. Irish independence is a certainty now. What could continue to incite such emotions on their side? No, I daresay that our two countries will grow into true neighbors and we will have another ally, like America, whom we shall share our fortunes with."

Now he looked at me with a resigned expression. "I fear that you are correct in believing that our fortunes will be inextricably linked, but it will be a most unhappy story."

I am certain that history will bear out my writings.

24 August, 1921

May God welcome those who died in Hull.

Looking at some thoughts I wrote down for the Ashcroft case, I recorded this quote from Pons. "Ought we not to say, rather, we believe there are certain phenomena which science as yet has not correctly interpreted or explained?"

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

I also note that he was rather complimentary towards that charlatan, Carnacki. For a man who makes his living through logic and deduction, Pons seems too amenable to the supernatural. Perhaps he could learn something from Sherlock Holmes. What was that quote Dr. Watson recorded; Something about 'ghosts need not apply'?

"I submit...that the simple is always preferable to the complex." Pons solved the case with a piece of thread. I doubt that Inspector Jamison would ever do such.

Undated

I must admit, I find some of Pons' cases to be of exceeding interest. Or rather, the way he goes about solving them to be. It might be instructive, after one is brought to completion, to go back and chronicle them, as Dr. Watson does for Sherlock Holmes. I must give further thought to this.

Undated

The Case of the Closed Window

Though the papers love sensational cases and bombastic headlines, many crimes, while comparatively mundane, still provide opportunities to showcase the amazing talents and unparalleled deductive and reasoning abilities of London's foremost consulting detective. It is just such a case that I will now recount.

Late one unseasonably cool late spring morning, Pons and I were lazing about our rooms when Mrs. Johnson admitted Inspector Jamison into our Praed Street lodgings. "Good morning inspector, what brings you to our abode? I saw nothing in this morning's papers that warrants a visit." Pons regarded our visitor patiently as he made his way into the room and sat down in an overstuffed chair.

He took off his hat and said, "I could use your help, Pons. The Yard received a call this morning from the estate of Lord Stanley Balfour. He was found dead in his home. I went out straightaway, but quite frankly, found myself baffled. Would you and the doctor come look things over?"

I had rarely seen Jamison so quickly and easily admit his confusion. Pons recognized this as well and resisted the impulse to poke a bit of fun at Jamison. "Parker and I will be glad to lend our meager talents. I believe we can leave now, if you like."

After informing Mrs. Johnson that we would not be back in time for lunch, we clambered into Jamison's police auto and rode to the estate of Lord Balfour, just beyond the outskirts of London. Balfour was a former Member of Parliament and had risen to a position of some note during his political career. Pons added that since retiring to his estate, Balfour had led the quiet life of a country lord. "Bancroft has mentioned that the government has occasionally called upon him."

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

We arrived at the manor, which was neatly kept, though smaller than I had expected. 'Quaint' was the word that settled itself into my mind. I doubted that Balfour had been an active socializer in his retirement and it didn't appear that he relished some "lord of the hunt" role that so many of our self-important politicians adopted after their careers ended. He had likely moved to this quiet abode to pursue his interests, which Jamison informed us consisted primarily of penning articles on military strategy and the occasional shooting. The walls looked to be of the Victorian Era, still in good repair, with trimmed ivy creeping up. The grounds were very well kept and a small stream bubbled along to the west side. It was a home lacking in pretentiousness.

The vehicle came to a stop and the driver let us out at the front entrance. It was a circular drive and had a modest garden in the center with a statue of some Greek philosopher or some such whom I could not identify. A local constable was standing at the door and he nodded to Jamison as we passed through the entryway. The inspector led us through the entry hall and upstairs to the master bedroom, ignoring all the rooms on the ground floor.

It was a dignified room and I noticed no disarray. There was a table in the corner, apparently used for reading and writing. I deduced this because there was a bookshelf and a stuffed armchair next to the table. A pen and some paper on the table

itself closed out the evidence. My inspection of the room stopped there, however. For it was at that moment that I turned to the bed near the opposite wall.

Lying there was Lord Balfour. He looked to be in peaceful slumber and the sheets appeared slept in. As I was looking at the body, Pons walked over and examined the window, which he found unlocked. "Jamison, has this room been changed in any way since the body was found?"

"No, Pons. The butler, Winsgrave, was concerned when his master did not answer his door this morning before breakfast. He came and found Balfour as you see him now. He then called the local constabulary, which contacted the Yard; that is not uncommon with important political personages. The room has been untouched."

This answer seemed to satisfy Pons. "This window could have been used as a point of entry and exit. We must examine the grounds below." I thought it odd that his attention first went to the window, rather than the dead man. But now he crossed over to the bed. He approached the body from all sides, inspecting the sheets and carpet beside the bed as well. While examining the corpse's neck, I presume for any traces of ligature marks, he bent over the face of the departed. He sniffed the air less than an inch from the mouth. He must have noticed something, as he did it a second time. "Parker, come over here. Tell me what you smell."

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

I joined my friend at the dead man's side and followed his lead. As I inhaled deeply, I detected a faint odor. "Pons, I believe that is turpentine I smell, though it is quite weak." I repeated my action and was certain of my deduction.

Pons smiled gravely. "Yes, Parker, you have correctly identified it." He now turned to Jamison and said "Inspector, this man was poisoned. A lethal dose of turpentine was administered. It was not ingested, which we can determine because there are no signs of vomiting. I believe a cloth, liberally doused, was held over his mouth. There may be the faintest skin irritations around the lips, though they are practically invisible. I see no signs of a struggle. It is likely he was asleep when it occurred and never woke." He looked around with a thoughtful expression. "I would have expected the remaining odor in the room to be stronger, though."

Jamison was clearly surprised at this pronouncement. The best response he could muster was, "Poisoned! Who would do such a thing?"

The detective looked at the inspector blankly. That is what we are here to determine, is it not? Who was in the house last night?"

Jamison pulled a small notebook from his coat pocket and flipped through a few pages. "Lady Balfour was here. She and her husband slept in separate rooms. Not uncommon in situations like this. The butler and the maid, a Ms. Chambers,

also were here, residing in the servant's quarters. That is all. The staff who work the garden and the stables sleep at their homes in the village."

Pons looked at the fireplace, which clearly had not been lit the night before. "I find it uncommonly cool in this room. Note that, Jamison." He then strode briskly out of the room and started downstairs. The baffled inspector looked at me quizzically. I could only give him a blank stare in return. As usual, I had no idea what path Pons was leading us down; I could only follow.

We reached the first floor landing and Pons asked Jamison to request the presence Lady Balfour in the den.

We proceeded to the den while Jamison summoned the lady of the house. I was very impressed with the room. A huge fireplace occupied a large portion of one wall. A picture of a distinguished looking man hung above it. I suspected it was some ancestor of Lord Balfour's. There were dozens of bookshelves, primarily filled with political treatises and manuals. I noted several yellowed copies of articles that have come to be known as "The Federalist Papers" in America. I was still not convinced that such a system could survive to rule as a world power. Their executive branch lacked the loyalty of the people that was engendered by a respected monarch. Their civil war had ripped the country in two. I believed that they would have been better off listening to one of their leading idealists, Alexander Hamilton.

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

There was a fine mahogany desk that served as Balfour's workplace. I imagine that he was in the process of writing his memoirs: a task which so many politicians pursue after retirement and sadly, one that he would never complete. Pons glanced at the various books and let out a noise of disapproval. "He certainly had a limited interest in reading. I see very few books not related to government."

We turned as Lady Balfour entered the room, followed by Jamison. "My husband was a man of limited interests, period, young man."

Pons introduced both of us, extending his sympathies on the death of her husband. She had gray hair, but seemed to be in good health and I judged her to be in her mid-sixties. She conveyed a sense of resolve and I could see her standing proudly by her husband's side as his career had ascended. She sat down in a chair by the fireplace, which was not lit, and waited for Pons to begin.

Jamison remained by the oak door, and I stood off to the side, not wanting to menace the bereaved woman. "Lady Balfour," Pons began "what time did your husband retire last evening?"

She looked directly at Pons with unwavering eyes. "I myself retired to my room shortly after nine o'clock. Stanley was here in this room, reading some boring tome. I heard him ascend the stairs and pass my room no more than an hour later. I was knitting, which I often do before going to sleep."

Pons crossed to a bookcase and idly fingered a volume. "Madame, do you know of anyone who

should wish your husband dead?" He asked this in a very casual tone, but I knew that he was watching her for any reaction.

She gave none that I could see. "No, I do not. We have lived quietly here since Stanley left government ten years ago." She paused, then added, "There has been a burglar in the village as of late."

"A burglar, you say? That certainly warrants further inquiry. I assure you we shall do all we can to apprehend your husband's killer. I do not wish to tax you further so recently after your unfortunate loss."

She nodded to him and rose. Jamison held the door open for her then closed it after she left. Pons looked at the inspector and said, "I believe we would do well to question the butler, then explore the grounds. Would you please ask Winsgrave to join us?"

Jamison left the room and Pons turned to me, his eyes alight. "Well Parker, what do you think so far?"

It seemed we had discovered nothing beyond the obvious. "Lord Balfour was killed by a lethal dose of turpentine. The butler, maid and his wife were on the premises. Beyond that, I see nothing."

Pons shook his head. "While we certainly cannot yet solve this case, there are already a few points that bear further notice. For starters, I will point you to the unlocked window and the faint remnants of turpentine." I do not know what else he might have added, because Jamison escorted in

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

the butler.

Winsgrave was short and stout, hardly the prototype of the English butler. He had a full beard and his suit seemed to hang as though it did not quite fit him. He looked from Pons to myself, waiting for one of us to speak. "I am Solar Pons and am looking into the death of Lord Balfour. I understand you were here last evening."

"That's right, sir" the butler replied in a strong voice.

"What time did he leave his study, and when did he retire to his rooms?"

Winsgrave thought about this for a moment before answering. "I looked in on him at 9:30 and he was in the den. I was replacing a light in the entry hall a bit before 10:00 when I met him in the hallway and asked if he required anything. He said that he was feeling a bit of a chill and was going directly to bed. He started to ascend the stairs, so I made a final check of the doors and went to my quarters."

"Other than his mentioning a chill, you saw or heard nothing else of note?" asked Pons. The butler shook his head. "And was the house secure?"

"Yes sir, all of the doors were bolted, and the windows were shut. That is part of my final duty before retiring for the night."

"I see," Pons said thoughtfully. "Did Lord Balfour

keep his bedroom door locked at night?"

"No sir, he did not."

Pons thanked the butler and dismissed him. The maid was called in, but had nothing to add. She had been in her room with a fever since after serving dinner. Pons led us outside and around to the back of the house. "As you can see Parker, the ground below Lord Balfour's window is undisturbed. I see no traces of footprints, or of ladder marks. If the village burglar entered the premises, it was not through that window. Of course, few burglars bring rags soaked in turpentine and murder someone."

He looked over the expanse of land behind the house. "Well, it seems clear who killed him." I was stunned by this pronouncement. I had no idea how he could have solved the mystery so quickly. Jamison had wandered around to the side of the house and did not hear Pons' declaration.

"What do you mean? You've solved the case? How could you have possibly figured it out?"

"Come Parker, I must verify a few things, but it looks obvious to me. Surely you have not missed it?" He quickly discerned my baffled expression.

"You have. Then you'll have to wait just a little longer." With that, he went back into the house, with me at his heels. Inspector Jamison was at the front door, talking to the constable. "Jamison, I

PAGES FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - VI (CONT)

need to look about unobserved. Could you distract Lady Balfour with some questions about the village thief?" Jamison said that he would. "Good man. Come along, Parker."

I heard Jamison's blustery voice echoing up the stairs as we ascended them and moved down the hallway. Pons quickly looked into a doorway, then another, until he reached the end of the hall. He opened a door and I followed him into what was obviously Mrs. Balfour's quarters. It was a spacious room, with a fireplace, four-poster bed, antique dresser and chest. Pons ignored all but the first and immediately walked over to the fireplace. The hearth was cold, but ashes indicated that there had been a fire within the past day. Using a poker, my friend stirred the ashes, muttering, "As I suspected."

"That closes things, Parker. An unpleasant turn of events, really. Let us go downstairs and fill in Jamison." Once again I failed to see what was so obvious to Solar Pons. The fireplace grate told me nothing. I turned to see Pons had already left the room and I quickly followed him downstairs. We found Jamison still conversing with Mrs. Balfour.

With no preamble, he said, "Jamison, I must inform you that it was the Lady Balfour who murdered her husband. I do not know the motive, but the facts are clear. You must place her under arrest." Jamison was too shocked to move. "Do you doubt me, Inspector?"

Jamison was certainly caught off guard but had too much respect for Pons' abilities to ignore the command. However, loud enough only for Pons and myself to hear, he did say, "I hope you're right about this or we're all sunk, Pons."

Showing no uncertainty, he summoned the constable from out front and instructed him to arrest the woman. The officer was obviously hesitant to do so and Pons spoke up.

"As we know, Lord Balfour was killed by someone holding a cloth heavily doused in turpentine over his mouth. As there were no signs of a struggle, he likely did not wake up at all. There was a faint odor of it left in the room. I commented that it was cool in there as well. This led me to believe the window had been open overnight to bring in fresh air and drive away the odor of the turpentine. A man with a chill is unlikely to leave the window open. Since there were no signs of entry via that window, and Winsgrave told me that nothing was amiss, I dismissed the burglar theory proposed by Lady Balfour. It is generally conceded that I have a more than passing knowledge regarding the means and ways of criminals. Burglars rarely commit a premeditated murder. And, if it had been an outsider who killed Lord Balfour, the criminal likely would have taken something to distract us."

He paused for dramatic effect. Everyone in the room was listening to every word, including the accused. "So, someone came in and closed the window before the body was found. Our suspects

MORE PAGES FROM
THE NOTEBOOKS
(CONT)

FEATURED CASE

(WWW.SOLARPONS.COM)

were Lady Balfour, Winsgrave, and the maid, who was indisposed and seemed the least likely candidate. Lord Balfour's fireplace had not been used for several days. However, I found that his wife had used her hearth within the past day. There were remnants of a mostly burned cloth in the fireplace. Jamison, I believe if you test it, you will find traces of turpentine."

Pons now turned to Lady Balfour. "I do not know why you killed your husband madam, but kill him you did, and now you must pay the price."

The woman did not say a word. She didn't lash out, or slump defiantly. She merely stood there, waiting for whatever came next. The constable did his duty and took her away.

Jamison had listened impassively to all this. "Pons, I know the evidence you had, but how did you know to focus on Mrs. Balfour, instead of Winsgrave?"

"Elementary, my dear Jamison. Winsgrave could have killed Balfour while in the den. Or he could have killed him while he slept. But he surely would have left a door unlocked or a window unlatched on the first floor. This would have forced me to seriously consider that an outsider had done the deed. That would have shifted my attentions away from him and led me into the village for facts. When he confirmed that the house was secure, this led me to suspect Mrs. Balfour. I do wonder why she killed her husband, though I doubt we shall ever know."

*The Adventure of the Seven Passengers -
7Pas*

*In Re: Sherlock Holmes, 1945
Regarding Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of Solar Pons*

Date

Copper/January, 1930

Patrick/January, 1930

Quotes

But if not this time, there will always be another time for Baron Kroll, and still another, no doubt, and so on, until it is our turn. Let us just be patient and wait upon time.

The Baron has been engaged in several rather dubious matters on the Continent; understand, nothing definite has ever been proved against him, but it remains that more than once someone in his household has been arrested for serious crime. Strangely enough, the criminal, after pleading guilty and being sent to prison, has in most cases been released. Some power has been at work, and no one who knows him has much hesitation in designating that power as Baron Kroll.

The Case

Evan Holdridge St. John visits Pons and tells him that the most important papers of the ongoing Naval Conference have been stolen. Every evening, seven couriers, each with a coded section of the daily report, took a train to the country estate of Lord Stapleton, the ailing Minister of War. St. John carried the most important section and traveled alone, sharing his compartment with an elderly gentleman. On the seventh trip, St. John and the other six were unknowingly gassed and woke up to find the man gone and the papers stolen. If the papers were made public or sold to a foreign country, the Conference would be useless and relations with other nations would be

FEATURED CASE
THE SEVEN PASSENGERS (CONT)

strained.

Comments

The first reference to Baron Ennesfred Kroll is made in this tale, though he would not appear in person until the next story, *The Adventure of the Lost Holiday*. Baron Kroll is to Solar Pons what Professor Moriarty was to Sherlock Holmes. However, he is not a carbon copy. Moriarty was a Gaslight Era Godfather, ruling London like a Victorian don. Crime was his trade. Pons refers to Kroll, who appears in multiple stories, as the prototype of an arch-criminal. However, he is more of a specialized villain: he is an espionage agent. That is, a spy.

From available sources, it appears that *Seven Passengers* was written in late 1944 or 1945. World War II and its effects were the most dominant aspects of daily life. Choosing to make Pons' nemesis a German spy was a natural act by Derleth. Even though the story is set mid-way between the two world wars, international intrigue was a contemporary theme.

Pons first met Kroll at a German Embassy ball the year before (1929) and describes the Baron as having "stooped shoulders" and a "sinister appearance." That certainly reminds the reader of the late, unlamented James Moriarty. But Moriarty had to keep a low profile as an underworld leader. Kroll, on the other hand, is described as "a social lion," which is more fitting for a spy on the diplomatic scene.

Kroll works behind the scenes, much like Moriarty. However, he is caught "red-handed" in the *Lost Holiday*. The Baron was a much more active participant in his second appearance in Parker's chronicles. He is set

up as Pons' foil in the first story, and then removed from the scene in the second, leaving the reader to wonder if he will return later.

St. John traveled alone in his compartment, with three men each in two other compartments. It would certainly seem more secure to have three men in one compartment, then two each in the remaining ones. It is possible that the method used would still have been effective, but it is hard to imagine leaving one man alone when he is traveling with six companions was considered the safest option.

Constable Mecker appears in several of Pons' cases, never excelling but always doing a dependable job. He seems to be a reliable "cop on the beat" whose contribution often extends no further than providing an official presence and making arrests.



Illustration by Frank Utpatel

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR
BY ANDREW NORRIS

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The following story is a work of fiction, and, as such, no relation should be inferred between the events and characters of this story with those of real life.

It is unfortunate for me to say that, though the spring of 1935 was generally a time of peace, tensions still existed between the world powers, as Pons and I discovered one morning, when we were called on a case which, had it failed, might have triggered the Second World War prematurely.

The day in question was clear and bright, casting beams of incandescent sunlight over Praed Street. Pons smiled warmly at the fine weather, taking in the beautiful blue of the sky.

"A lovely day, is it not, Parker?" he remarked as we settled down to tea. "A beautiful morning, even in London,"

"Yes, and a fairly quiet one," said I. "I'm amazed at how quiet our office has been all week!"

"I like to think that even the average criminal likes to pause to admire the continuing good weather, Parker, and I am certain that is the cause of our recent lack of business."

We settled down to tea, when a slight commotion stirred in the hallway. Not a violent one, but of a quieter, more subdued variety. Mrs. Johnson was greeting someone, who had evidently arrived unexpectedly. I turned to face the closed door to hear

the exchange of voices.

"I wonder who that could be?" I muttered beneath my breath.

"Judging by the scuffling of his walk and the forte of his voice," Pons began, placing his tea aside and standing up. "I would say that we are about to receive a surprise visit from brother Bancroft himself,"

Sure enough, the bulky figure of Bancroft strode through the door, weighted down by an enormous coat, collar up to conceal his face. Both Solar and I were quite surprised at this attempt of anonymity, which Bancroft seemed to perceive, for he immediately set about explaining his behaviour.

"I am sorry that I gave you no warning of my arrival, Solar," he announced, handing his coat to Mrs. Johnson. "But Whitehall is at present in an alarming state, and we have been ordered by the highest powers to take precautions against any shadow agents who might be following us,"

"I see," Solar frowned, returning to his seat as Bancroft sat down. "And what is this crisis that brings you here?"

"A very grave matter, Solar," came the grim reply. "My hands are tied by the law, but being a free agent, you have the ability to investigate this matter freely,"

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR (CONT)

"Would this be anything to do with the Nazis?" I asked curiously.

"That I cannot be sure of, Doctor, but there are certainly foreign agents at work who plan to cause havoc to our espionage system," Solar leaned forward to bring himself closer to Bancroft, as Bancroft himself began to explain the full facts of the case.

Recently, an aspiring animator had invented an unusual new code on behalf of the government to convey messages between various agents across the country without arousing suspicion. Several secret messages would be hidden within the dialogue of an animated cartoon that would be shown at certain times in cinemas across the country. This message, once decoded, would give the map reference of a location where the designated agents could meet, and a second message would provide a meeting time. Information could then be exchanged between agents without any danger of others knowing the time and place of their meeting. Such a code was possible to create by having the coded dialogue recorded last, with the animated subjects made without sound so that any form of dialogue could be made to fit them at short notice.

"A very cunning system," Solar agreed afterward.

"But is there no danger that other agents could confuse these orders for their own?"

"Impossible," Bancroft shook his head. "Only designated agents are told when to go and where. The widespread use of this system is so that we can

have several agents working at once, with different short films to watch."

"And why is this such a crisis? Have the enemy agents cracked the code?"

"No, but the animator who created the system and the codes has been kidnapped, and he is the only man outside of Whitehall who knows how the system works and what codes to use,"

"And if the enemy agents can crack the code, then the entire system would break down and messages could be easily intercepted by foreign spies,"

"Precisely, Solar. Already, several of our agents have been attacked and valuable information stolen. As such, all but one of these animated films have been withdrawn. The last one we hope to use as a trap, but we require your aid should anything go wrong."

"Very well, dear brother," came the pleased reply of Solar. "Simply tell us the cinema to attend, and we shall visit it."

A smile passed over Bancroft's face, pleased to see that an understanding was still present between the two brothers.

"The Warwick Cinema in Birmingham at four o'clock this afternoon. The feature is entitled "Stanley Squirrel's Pub Crawl". One more thing: the time will refer to tonight, which will appear before the map reference."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR (CONT)

"Have faith in us, Bancroft. We shall not fail," Solar announced, and prepared to leave long before Bancroft had been reunited with his enormous coat.

Within the space of a few hours, we had arrived at the spacious cinema nestled in the suburban area of Acocks Green, and Pons and I sat near the front so that we might hear every word. It was Pons' belief that the figures we required would not be so open for the more intelligent decoders to understand, and so it was essential that every word be recorded and examined as soon as possible. This we did, paying little attention to the actual cartoon and more to the words. The facts we drew from the cartoon were as follows:

THE YEAR 1930

16,000 GIANT ACORNS

UPSAN DOWNS NATURE RESERVE

2 FLYING-SQUIRRELS, BOTH AGED 52 1/4

"Taking all of this into account, Parker," murmured Pons as we sat in a secluded area outside the cinema. "I have a feeling that we have gained even more information here than just map references and time. The age of the flying-squirrels and their quantity - what do you make of them?"

"I think they describe latitude and longitude of a map, I would say, with the 1/4 being the excess of one of the two figures,"

"Quite so, Parker," agreed Pons. "And it would need to be a map that is in excessive circulation at present. Road Maps are confined to too short an area,

and globes are difficult to calculate. So, what are we left with?"

"An atlas?"

"Correct! The latest edition of the Standard Atlas, I would have to say, and the year no doubt represents time on a 24-hour clock."

"But where do the acorns and the park come in, Pons?"

"I believe that they will give us a more specific clue, once we know what the location is, of course."

Fortunately for us, the Public Library was but a short distance from the Cinema, and so we were able to borrow the latest edition of the Standard Atlas and examine the map of the British Isles. Examining the grid references provided by the cartoon, the location of the map turned out to be Warwick, a town a short distance south of Birmingham.

"Then it is clear," Pons announced. "We are to take £16,000 to the nature reserve outside of Warwick at half-past seven tonight."

"Good heavens, Pons!" I exclaimed. "What makes you think that money is involved in this?"

"I don't, Parker, but the number 16,000 would not have been so precise if it was purely for comical hyperbole. Why not, say, a million acorns? No, the number is far too specific to be a throwaway joke,

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR (CONT)

Parker. These agents have realised that the Government is planning action on this man's kidnapper, and are demanding a ransom."

"How can you be sure, though, Pons? Bancroft said that this cartoon was the last to be aired. It was produced by the animator himself!"

"Yes, but there is one important factor that give that matter away, Parker." Our conversation moved outside as we traveled towards the railway station. "Throughout the cartoon, the voice of the voice-actor remained the same – a baritone English, but then the voice in question appeared to turn to a distinct bass tone on saying the words "16,000". Even secret messages can be disguised as technical blips, Parker, and I believe that these agents altered the dialogue, knowing that the government will be attempting to recover the kidnapped animator. Let us pray we are in time to save him!"

We arrived at Warwick at approximately ten minutes to six in the afternoon. We made haste to travel to the small nature reserve situated on the outskirts of the town, with the dominating castle looming menacingly over it like a phantom waiting in the dark. The shadows provided the perfect cover as Pons and I took shelter behind a tree, where we could observe the entire reserve from this one vantage point.

"Do you think that another Whitehall agent would have intercepted that message, Pons?" I asked, kneeling down.

"My dear Parker," Pons whispered. "I doubt very

much that brother Bancroft would have aired that cartoon purely for our benefit. It would have been sensible to close down the system, but it seems that the system is the only means of communication between Whitehall and the kidnappers. And, obviously, we must be ready to help this agent should trouble arise."

Night soon fell, and the animals of the park quieted down as the town fell asleep. Pons remained awake and alert, scanning the park for the slightest movement that might help us. We were the only humans present in the reserve, and only the howling of the wind indicated any sign of activity. It was fast approaching half-past seven, and my patience was beginning to grow thin.

"Where the devil are they?" I hissed in a low voice. "If they want to make the deal, why don't they appear?"

"Hush!" snapped Pons, and pointed to a clearing towards the castle.. "Over there!"

Presently, we saw a man in a bowler hat approaching the wall. He was alone, and appeared to remain placid as he made his way to the wall. I noticed that he was carrying a briefcase under his arm, yet made no attempt to conceal it. From behind us, we heard the sound of an approaching car, and were forced to move from our tree to a nearby bush that overlooked the main road. The car came closer, and we saw that it was a Morris Eight saloon, with two men in fedora hats in the front seat, and a sort of bundle on the back seat. The car stopped and switched off its headlights.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR (CONT)

The two men alighted, muttering in a language unfamiliar to me. They removed the bundle and struggled to carry it between them. In the darkness, Pons and I saw that the bundle was shaped like a man, and once the two men were well out of sight, Pons made a daring effort to approach the vehicle, with myself straggling behind.

"Parker," hissed Pons in a low voice. "Pass me that can of paint, over there, by the fence," I complied, although I was uncertain of what could be achieved by all of this. From the dim light of the moon, Pons fitted the can to the underside of the car, and pierced a small hole in the underside using the prick of a fine needle.

"The trail of paint will allow us to follow them to their hideout, where it will but be a case of arresting them!" grinned my companion, and we ran off into the night, hoping that the agents had not seen or heard us.

We ran straight for the police station, and gave our information to a thankfully open-minded police sergeant, who accompanied us, along with two other officers, to follow the drops of paint left by our German friends. We traced them to a small boarding house in the market town of Solihull on the outskirts of Birmingham. The sergeant, whose name was Bradshaw, ordered one of his officers to the rear of the premises, and waited before shouting out his orders.

"This is Sgt. Bradshaw of the Warwick Police!" he bellowed. "Open up or we will break down the door!"

We heard the men shouting in their own language, evidently in panic. The door did not open.

"This is your last warning!" Bradshaw shouted. "Open up or we will break in the door!"

"Sarge!" the officer around the back called. "They're here!"

Bradshaw and the other policeman ran after them. I almost followed, but Pons held me back.

"They will have seen him," Pons said. "They may double-back to the front door,"

Pons was correct. The two men, still wearing their fedoras, appeared at the front door, their rugged faces pale with fright. They stopped on seeing Pons standing before them, frozen to the spot.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Pons smiled. "I do believe your luck has run out..."

Sgt. Bradshaw and the two constables arrested the men, and worked in co-operation with the police in Solihull to search their hideout. The £16,000 was recovered, as was the animator, who had been hidden inside the bundle we had seen in Warwick. The animator later told the authorities that the agents had singled him out not just because of his knowledge of the system, but be-

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ASPIRING
ANIMATOR (CONT)

cause he himself had devised it, and the agents had been instructed by their superiors to extract as much information about the new code as they could by whatever means they felt necessary. To do this, the agents had used torture on the poor director, who though safe, was left badly shaken from his experiences, and so I have chosen to leave him anonymous in order to protect his identity.

During the trial, the two agents were charged simply for the kidnapping of a British citizen, and the coded messages were never alluded to. The verdict was delivered in June 1935, and the two men were imprisoned for a minimum of ten years each. With the culprits caught, Whitehall ordered the use of coded messages in cartoon films to be halted to prevent such an incident ever happening again, and to prevent such messages being intercepted by enemy agents.

Curiously enough, a few weeks after the passing of the sentence on the two criminals, a letter addressed to Pons arrived at Praed Street regarding the case, which reads as follows:

Mr. Pons,

Once again, we find ourselves evenly matched.

Though you shall never find any information that

will ever link me to this scandal, I think you will find that we have more information about your silly little messages than you think. However, we know better than to use them ourselves, especially since you may attempt to play tit-for-tat in this little game of Find the Message. In any case, we have more effective ways of communicating than simply watching a short cartoon.

I look forward to meeting you again, Pons, and let us hope that at least one of us may actually triumph, rather than put up with these ridiculous stalemates,

Baron Ennesfred Kroll

Andrew Norris is the author of *Solar Pons & the War of the Worlds*, which was featured in Issue 3.1 of the *Solar Pons Gazette*. You can also find his tribute to Basil of Baker Street and Solar Pons, Gabriel of Praed Street, in ebook form at amazon.com

“On one red-letter day, a day of gilt and glory, the young man dashed off three Solar Pons adventures at a sitting and two of them survive in this collection, ‘The Norcross Riddle’ and ‘The Three Red Dwarfs’

- Vincent Starrett from the Foreword to ‘In Re: Sherlock Holmes’

The Pontine Canon Abbreviations
By Peter A. Ruber and Ronald De Waal

Alum – Aluminum Crutch	MisT – Missing Tenants
Amat – Amateur Philologist	MrFa – Mr. Fairlie’s Final Journey
Asco – Ascot Scandal	Mosa – Mosaic Cylinders
Ball – Ball of Nostradamus	MutM – The Muttering Man
Beni – Benin Bronze	Norc – Norcross Riddle
Bish – Bishop’s Companion	Orie – Orient Express
BlkC – Black Cardinal	Para – Paralytic Mendicant
BlkN – Black Narcissus	Penn – Penny Magenta
Blin – Blind Clairaudient	Perf – Perfect Husband
Book – Bookseller’s Clerk	Prae – Praed Street Irregulars
Brok – Broken Chessman	Prop – Proper Comma
Camb – Camberwell Beauty	Purl – Purloined Periapt
Chin – China Cottage	RedL – Red Leech
Circ – Circular Room	Rema – Remarkable Worm
Clov – Cloverdale Kennels	RetN – Retired Novelist
Crou – Crouching Dog	Rico – Ricoletti of the Club Foot
DevF – Devil’s Footprints	Rydb – Rydberg Numbers
DogM – Dog in the Manger	7Pas – Seven Passengers
Dorr – Dorrington Inheritance	7Sis – Seven Sisters
Fata – Fatal Glance	Shap – Shaplow Millions
5Roy – Five Royal Coachmen	SinH – Sinister House
FriB – Frightened Baronet	6Sil – Six Silver Spiders
GolB – Golden Bracelet	Snit – Snitch in Time
Gric – Grice-Paterson Curse	Soth – Sotheby Salesman
Hats – Hats of M. Dulac	Spur – Spurious Tamerlane
Haun – Haunted Library	Star – The Green Stars
Innk – Innkeeper’s Clerk	Ston – Stone of Scone
Inta – Intarsia Box	SusA – Sussex Archers
Late – Late Mr. Flaversham	Swed – Swedenborg Signatures
Limp – Limping Man	3Red – Three Red Dwarfs
Litt – Little Hangman	Tott – Tottenham Werewolf
LosD – Lost Dutchman	Trai – Trained Cormorant
LosH – Lost Holiday	Trip – Triple Kent
LosL – Lost Locomotive	Trou – Troubled Magistrate
ManB – Man with the Broken Face	Uniq – Unique Dickensians
MazB – Mazarine Blue	ViMu – The Viennese Musician
MisH – Missing Huntsman	Whis – Whispering Knights

FROM THE PONTINE DOSSIER

LET THERE BE LIGHT:
CHRIS REDMOND

“Sherlock Holmes.” What does that name bring to mind? The whole idea of a traditional, footprint-tracing sleuth is conjured up by those three seductive syllables, with which every literate person is now so familiar that a variation in them would be what Vincent Starrett calls “paradoxically unthinkable.” And yet, they have been varied many times; indeed, when the great detective first appeared, his name was quite different.

Those who secretly cling to the sweet belief that Sherlock Holmes really did live consider with puzzlement the origin of his name, and conclude that he was William Sherlock Scott Holmes. William Sherlock was a theologian of the seventeenth century; the “Scott”, says William Baring-Could, is from the romantic author, Sir Walter Scott.’ Others, who see him only as a literary figure, go for their information to the manuscripts and notes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The earliest such notes give the detective’s name as “Sherrinford Holmes”- and his companion’s, horrifyingly, as “Ormond Seeker.” Doyle himself says elsewhere that the name was “Sherringford”-note the additional “g”-and H. Douglas Thompson recalls it as “Sherrington Hope,” which Ellery Queen suggests is a garbled combination of Sherrinford Holmes and Jefferson Hope, the latter being the villain of *A Study in Scarlet*. ’

But somehow this version was not musical; it did not have the magic a detective must have. “Sherrinford”, from “shearing-ford”, the stream crossing where the sheep were sheared: how prosaic, how little like the romance a detective’s name must conjure up! The

“Holmes” seemed inevitable, apparently taken from Doyle’s admired Oliver Wendell Holmes,⁵ but the forename was not yet quite satisfactory.

Then it came: Sherlock Holmes.

“Sherlock” may have been the divine of the 1690’s, but legend (and, says Starrett,⁶ Doyle) claims rather that Sherlock was a cricketer whose

bowling gave Conan Doyle thirty runs one day, and a grateful memory long after.

But what does it mean? D.A. Redmond has shown, in a monograph as yet unpublished, that there are three derivations of the name “Sherlock”. One is from a geographical name; the second is a derivative meaning “one with shorn hair.” But the third origin is of particular interest: it is an attributive from seer, meaning “clear” or “bright”, and locc, which again means “lock” or “hair”. “Sherlock”-bright-haired, or shining- Sherlock Holmes.



Illustration - Rick Harrison

FROM THE PONTINE DOSSIER

LET THERE BE LIGHT (CONT)

Vincent Starrett calls it "a name that has become a permanent part of the -English language," as indeed it has: it will be found as noun and verb in the unabridged dictionary. It is, moreover, so well known as the name of a detective that tortured and spoonerised versions by the dozen are in popular use. Ellery Queen lists forty-eight of them, ranging from the punning "Sherlock Abodes" through "Sherbet Scones" to "Picklock Holes" and finally "Solar Pans."

Solar Pons is perhaps the most serious of all the burlesque versions. August Derleth, himself, has explained the creation of the name, designed, of course, as an echo of "Sherlock Holmes." The original initials, which he had planned to use, were discarded when he hit on the Latin "pans", or bridge. The great detective was, he reasoned, a bridge between darkness and light; this suggested the forename, Solar, clearly suggesting reason and light. The combined name rang true, and Solar Pons it was.*

And here it is again. Where Sherlock Holmes is "shining", Solar Pons is "light". The symbolism cannot be a total coincidence. It can only be an indication that the great detectives of the age are to be, like Dante's Beatrice, "a light between truth and intellect."

' *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (University of Chicago Press, 1960). page 6.

' *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* (Clarkson N. Potter, 1962). page 13.

'Starrett, locl. cit.

"Introduction" to *The Memoirs of Solar POn.s* (Mycroft & Moran, 1951), page xi.

'Starrett. lot. cit.

'Starrett, page 7.

'Starrett, page 7.

'Queen, op. cit., pages xiii-xxi.

Ibid. page xxi.

This article appeared in the 1977 Edition (Volume 3, Number 2) of *The Pontine Dossier*.

The plain fact is that the Doyle sons are a pair of lazy bastards who have tried to eke out a complete living from proceeds of their father's writings. Other have told me that before; I was dubious; but I am less so."

- August Derleth in a letter to Anthony Boucher, regarding the Doyle's attempts to kill 'In Re: Sherlock Holmes'

THE ADVENTURE OF THE
LOST LOCOMOTIVE RECONSIDERED
BY ANDREW NORRIS

The combination of detective fiction and railway literature is a blend of two genres that has been perfectly matched since the notion of a railway detective first captured the imagination of early writers, in particular Victor Whitechurch, whose character Thorpe Hazell was the first recognisable railway detective character in fiction, and Sir Basil Thomson, author of the 1912 short story *Sir Gilbert Murrell's Picture*. The railway detective sub-genre survives today via writers such as Andrew Martin, the author of the Jim Stringer novels, and Edward Marston, whose novels follow Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck on a number of railway-themed mysteries set in the 1850's.

The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive was August Derleth's contribution to the railway mystery genre, although it was, first and foremost, a gentle pastiche of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost Special*, which has often been inferred to be a Sherlock Holmes story by those who have read it. *The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive* stands out from other Solar Pons stories (with the exception of *The Adventure of the Orient Express*) by the heightened role that the railway plays in the story. It is more than just a mode of transport for Pons and

Parker to move from place to place to investigate a mystery – the railway *is* the mystery.

The railway company in Doyle's work was the fictional London and West Coast Railway, yet Derleth opted for the Great Northern Railway for his pastiche. Derleth's choice of name for his railway company is interesting, for whilst it is possible that Derleth merely thought the name to be pure fiction, and may have borrowed the name of the Great Northern Railway of the United States for his fictional railway, there really was a Great Northern Railway active in Great Britain, and it is the purpose of this article to compare both the history and activities of the real GNR with those of the railway that Derleth devised for his story.

Derleth, having never visited Great Britain in his lifetime, had to rely on what he knew of London and of Great Britain in general from hearsay, which perhaps explains why *The Adventure of the Tottenham Werewolf* depicts Tottenham as a Yorkshire village rather than a busy London district! Likewise, Derleth knew almost nothing about the railways of Britain, let alone their history, and it is of no surprise that his presentation of

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the Great Northern Railway is different to the Great Northern Railway in reality. The real-life Great Northern Railway was formed by the London and York Railway Act of 1846, and ended operations on January 1st 1923, when it was absorbed into the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER). The date of 1921 for *The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive* in the Pontine Canon is, at least, historically accurate. Similarly, the inclusion of a railway station on GNR lines at Sheffield is also true, but the station itself belonged to the rival Midland Railway, with a branch-line running from Sheffield onto the GNR main line at the station of Bawtry in southern Yorkshire. Here, however, the similarities end, for this branch-line was not a direct link from the main line as Derleth's story implies, and if Pons and Parker were ever to make it to Sheffield, a change of trains would have been required, since the GNR main line proceeded straight through to York, many miles north of Sheffield.

Similarly, Derleth names Euston as the London terminus for the Great Northern Railway, not knowing that the real GNR terminus was actually at King's Cross station. Euston station had been the first railway station in London, forming part of the London and Birmingham Railway that had

opened in 1838. At the time Solar Pons and Dr. Parker were investigating the strange happenings along GNR metals, Euston was in the hands of the rival London and North Western Railway, although both companies would eventually merge into the new LNER in 1923.



Fig. 1 - The entrance to the original Euston station built in 1838. Despite the Sherlockian aura of this photograph from 1896, Pons and Parker would not have been at Euston if they wanted to get to Sheffield on time! Photograph provided courtesy of the National Archive.

The lost locomotive of the title is GNR No. 177, which disappeared passing through the (fictional) stations of Girton and Kendon-on-Lea, and replaces LWCR No. 247 *Rochdale* in Doyle's story. Derleth explains that No. 177 was running light-engine (i.e. without any carriages or wagons) with its passenger aboard the footplate. It was not uncommon for special trains to be chartered, as Doyle himself showed in *The Lost Special* and in *The Adventure of the Final Problem*, but for a passenger to ride on the footplate of the locomotive was a very rare occurrence indeed, unless there were no carriages readily available. But, in all fair-

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ness, had No. 177 been taking a carriage when it disappeared, it would have made even more difficult to hide the special from plain sight, and thus the story would be over much sooner.

The real-life GNR No. 177 is just as elusive as its literary counterpart. Most records of GNR locomotives are incomplete, and No. 177 is one number that has evaded me constantly whilst gathering resource material for this article. However, what few scraps I have found say that No. 177 was a Class J3 tank engine built sometime between 1851 and 1853, with an 0-6-0 wheel arrangement (that is to say, no front wheels, six driving wheels, three on each side of the engine, and no trailing wheels behind). I have yet to find any more information on this locomotive.

Whilst inspecting the railway tracks for clues, Pons and Parker are given a ride upon:

“...a motor-driven car, similar in construction to a hand-car, but shielded on three sides from wind and weather, with an open back, allowing for freedom of movement to and from the car...”

This is one of few appearances in railway fiction of the under-appreciated platelayer's trolley. The first of these were, as Derleth correctly notes, small hand-trolleys, but tiny, square-shaped petrol vehicles gradually replaced these as time went on. The platelayer's trolleys were designed and built to take workmen to any point along the line without the need for a chartered train. The motor trolleys first appeared on Britain's railways some-

time after the First World War, and were based on the narrow gauge petrol locomotives built in Britain and used in France to carry supplies to and from the Western Front. However, the British models depart from those used on American railroads in the sense that the British trolleys are fully enclosed, with four walls completely covered, and access to and from the vehicle made by doors on either side of the seats. Of course, it is more than possible that an American trolley just happened to be on loan to the GNR when Pons and Parker arrived on the scene.

Whilst at the scrapyards of old locomotives and rolling stock, Derleth (or perhaps Dr. Parker) makes an Americanism, which, to any British railwayman, would sound unusual. A number of tankers are mentioned amongst the rolling stock awaiting scrap, which are mentioned throughout the narrative as “tank cars”. This is a term native to the United States, whilst its British counterpart is “tanker wagons” or simply “tankers”. Naturally, Derleth, having never been to England, would not have known this, just as he would not know that the term “engine driver” is used on British railways, and not “engineer”. On the other hand, it is possible that these Americanisms were intentional – perhaps the railwaymen used the terms “tankers” and “engine drivers” during the conversation, but Parker, being American, chose to use the American terms when he came to chronicle the incident.

Finally, I feel a word about *The Adventure of the*

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Lost Locomotive as a railway mystery story is necessary for readers of the Pontine canon to truly appreciate it. Like all Solar Pons stories, it is a cleverly written homage to an earlier work – in this case, *The Lost Special* – and provides an excellent example of how the railways, even after the Victorian era had long since ended, could still play an important part in the detective story. It is also interesting because it departs from the usual depiction of the railways in the gaslight romances – the engine is given a starring role rather than a bit-part, and the railway line itself has its own part to play in the story, and is not just a set of metals that run between a busy London station and an isolated country halt in a sparsely populated area of rural England.

No other examples of railway detective literature capture the true spirit of Britain's pre-1923 railways quite so much as *The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive*, which went beyond the steam and the soot to bring us a thrilling railway mystery, and it is for that reason why it has such a special place in the Pontine Canon – though it is not a fully accurate depiction of the GNR, it is still a very

entertaining story that is as every bit as exciting as the Conan Doyle story it pays tribute to.

THE VOICES OF THE WHISPERING KNIGHTS

are a scion devoted to the reading and enjoyment of the Ponsian chronicles and all manifestations of detective fiction, from Judge Dee to Philo Vance.

Our interests extend to macabre and speculative fiction. At present, the scion is conducted by correspondence; but should sufficient new members be of a convenient locale, the club will hold formal meetings and the corresponding members will be informed by newsletter. Inquiries should be directed to: Frances Van Antwerp (First Voice), 4920 North Melrose, Tampa, Florida 33609.

As with the Baker Street Irregulars, there were scion societies of The Praed Street Irregulars. The Whispering Knights advertised their existence in the 1977 Edition of *The Pontine Dossier*

The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive - LosL
The Memoirs of Solar Pons, 1951
The Memoirs of Solar Pons

Date

Copper/May 1921

Patrick/June, 1922

Quotes

I concede it is highly improbable. One ought not to confuse the improbable with the impossible.

The Case

Sir Ernest McVeagh, Director of the Great Northern Railway. Tells Pons that American James Mason had chartered a special for Sheffield the previous evening. Number 177 had vanished after passing Girton and could not be found. Pons sets out to locate the train and its mysterious passenger.

Comments

Inspector Jamison quotes tosses one of Pons' maxims back at him, saying "I believe it was you who once said that if the possible explanations are shown to be inadequate, then the only remaining explanation, however untenable, must be true."

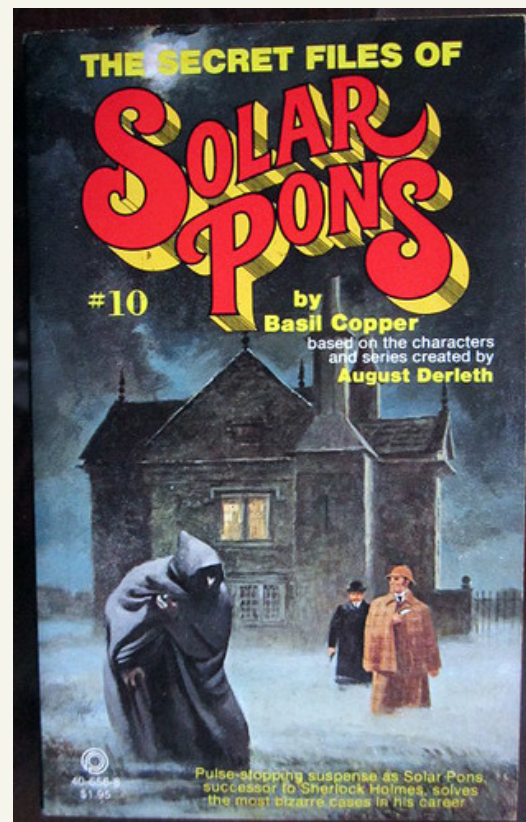
Again we see the Assumption Principle applied. Pons says, "I am afraid our good Inspector Jamison has proceeded on the theory that you have just advanced, that the locomotive did not actually vanish. Let us, on the contrary, assume that it did..."

Pons' refutation of the basic assumption

assumed by someone else involved with the case, followed by his pursuit of the opposite assumption, leads him to the solution. Throughout the Pontine Canon, we see this device.

This tale follows the path of Doyle's *The Lost Special*. However, it has a very different ending and is a good example of how Derleth could imitate Sir Arthur, yet come up with original twists that satisfied the reader. Both do contain a grand conspiracy, however.

Bob Byrne lists this as one of his five favorite Pons stories.



I included this just because I think it's the coolest cover of all the Pons Pinnacle paperbacks.

S O L A R P O N S A N D T H E C T H U L H U M Y T H O S B Y
E R I C V O N K O N N E N B E R G A N D P I E R R E D E H A M M A I S

In August Derleth's thumbnail biography of Solar Pons, it was stated that he had written six monographs, two of which concern us, as they deal with the "Cthulhu Mythos." The first monograph, published in 1905, was entitled *An Inquiry into the Nan-Matal Ruins of Ponape*, and the second, published in 1931, was entitled *An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others*.

In going through the adventures that were written up by Dr. Lyndon Parker, there is only one adventure which touched upon the "Cthulhu Mythos." This adventure was entitled "The Adventure of the Six Silver Spiders" upon its publication in the public press. In examining a catalogue for the sale of a private collection of twenty volumes, Parker mentioned some of the titles therein: *Necronomicon*, *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, *Cultes des Goules*, *De Vermis Mysteriis*, and *Liber Ivonis*. It is obvious to the student of the "Cthulhu Mythos" that these are titles of books which are integral to the understanding of the threat from this mythology, if everything about it can be taken as absolute truth.

Pons told Parker that "All these books have a precarious existence only in the writings of certain minor authors of American origin, all apparently followers, in a remote sense, of the work of Edgar Allan Poe. The catalogue is, in short, a hoax."

There would seem to be a discrepancy here, for if Pons firmly believed that these books were spurious, then what do we make of the two monographs which he published? To rectify this discrepancy, and to give some justification for the rectification, we need to backtrack a little.

Solar Pons was born in 1880 and graduated from Oxford in 1899. His first monograph, *An Inquiry into the Nan-Matal Ruins of Ponape*, was published in 1905. He established his private inquiry practice in 1907, which was only interrupted by his service with British Intelligence during World War I. Dr. Lyndon Parker moved in with Pons at 7B Praed Street and began writing up the adventures of Solar Pons in January 1928, moving out in January 1933 when he married. "The Adventure of the Six Silver Spiders" occurred in January of 1930. And the second monograph, *An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others*, was published in 1931.

In this day and age, the 1990's, the two monographs are exceedingly rare, whereas Parker's write-ups of Solar Pons's adventures are kept in print almost continuously. To give some feeling to the conclusions which will follow, we will quote from both monographs.

The following excerpts were deleted from Solar Pons's monograph *An Inquiry into the Nan-Matal Ruins of Ponape* before its publication in 1905 and were recently discovered among his notes. He is known to have commented to Dr. Lyndon Parker that he had found it necessary to omit several striking incidents because

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

of a request from the Admiralty in one case, an obligation to protect the reputation of a certain noble family in another, and in all a fear that their outré nature would work against acceptance of his conclusions.

Of course hearsay abounds concerning strange happenings in the area, but there is one well-documented incident, the episode of the sloop *Naples* near Ponape. The account released to the press said only that the crew had been lost in a storm, but certain additional details were made known to me privately. Several shells of molluscs, pierced as though for use in jewelry, were found aboard. They were identified as belonging to a species of clam thought to exist only at great depths. There were peculiar scratches on the decks, arranged in star-shaped groups of five and suggesting nothing so much as the claw marks of some strange beast. But the most bizarre point did not appear until the ship was towed to New Zealand and placed in dry dock. There was found jammed in the rudder hinge the limb of an unknown sea creature, resembling the arm of a frog the size of a man.

I was reminded of those star-shaped scratches during the Adventure of the Abandoned Lighthouse, where a man went mad after following up a hint in a forbidden book. I was unable to shed any light on the young man's death and was obliged to record the case in my files as an inconclusive failure. He had locked himself into the beacon chamber and collapsed into gibbering imbecility, leaving no testimony to his experience. On the stairs leading up to the chamber I found minute traces of scratches arranged like those on the *Naples*. There were also traces of a slimy substance which was definitely organic, though I could not match it with any known marine or terrestrial organism. Considering our limited knowledge of sea life and the chemistry of living things this is not surprising; but I did succeed in matching it with traces found on the outside surface of the beacon room window, a place so difficult of access that my companion professed fear of heart failure while watching me obtain the samples.

The second excerpt is as follows:

There exists in the files of Scotland Yard another case with a thread leading to Ponape. It is officially labeled "unsolved," as is the humane custom when the murderer is known to be dead. In my own files it is labeled the Adventure of the Eye of Lapis Lazuli. The murderer was the educated and widely travelled son of a highly placed family and showed no outward sign of any morbid, vicious or unbalanced qualities either before or during the period when he committed some of the most atrocious deeds in the history of crime. Indeed so wholesome did he seem that the police, convinced that the murders must be the work of a raving luna-

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

tic, never considered him suspect until I entered the case. He ultimately took his own life, leaving a handful of crushed fragments of lapis lazuli and a diary which recounted his acquisition on Ponape of a device in the form of an eye of inlaid gemstone and his gradual enslavement, through the stone, by some malignant intelligence from beyond the visible world.

And the third fragment:

I have had one other case in which a connection with Ponape appeared: the case of the Doom among the Standing Stones. The connection was indeed tenuous; my quarry had spent two years there in his youth and made a cryptic reference to it in a letter, which I contrived to inspect, to a mysterious and untraceable associate on the continent. But the case itself, or rather the end of it, was quite worthy of the reader's attention.

My client had been for some time subject to harassment, at once terrifying and yet so subtle that the police could do nothing with the object of forcing him to hand over certain books and artifacts of great antiquity which had been carefully guarded by his family for generations, even though their significance had been lost and was now unknown to him. The perpetrator was an evil man with a reputation for dabbling in black magic. At my suggestion the client had agreed to his demands in order to trap him with proof of extortion. Possibly suspecting a trap, the villain had dictated a meeting at night in a circle of megalithic tors and arches in the midst of a desolate moor.

Early on the day of the meeting I went there alone to scout out the terrain. I soon observed that the place had been very recently visited, though the indications were inadequate to deduce their purpose. There was a circular smudge from the base of a bull's eye lantern, there were colored wax drippings as from candles, and a foul smelling oil substance had been poured on the ground at four points around the central altar stone. I was able to identify this as a mixture of herbal distillates combined with unidentifiable animal material.

There was an even more peculiar trace just outside the circle. It had been completely surrounded with a series of rough stones in the shape of five-pointed stars, very evenly spaced at intervals of three feet, four inches. Upon picking one up I felt such a strong tingling sensation in my hand that I dropped it, smashing it into four parts. I reassembled the broken star as inconspicuously as possible, picked up another and placed it in my pocket for later examination and made a substitute of pebbles and clay that would keep my man from noticing any change in the arrangement.

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

I returned that evening, a half hour before sunset and an hour and a half before my client had agreed to meet him, approaching the circle cautiously by a devious route from the village where I was lodging. My intention was to arrive well before either of them and find a hidden vantage point but as I made my wary approach I descried the blackmailer proceeding alone along the main path. This slowed my progress considerably and I was unable to reach the circle before darkness had fallen and a mist was rolling in from the direction of the sea. By then I could see that he was performing some sort of ritual by the light of a number of small candles, declaiming to the empty night in the harsh syllables of some alien tongue.

I have never been able to explain what happened next in terms of our normal concepts of reality, and shall leave it for the reader to form his own speculation, bearing in mind that I am a trained observer of unimaginative temperament.

The mist now formed a solid gray background across the candle-lit circle of great stones, while the circle itself appeared filled with low curls of the drifting vapor. I have had much experience with fogs of all kinds and am quite certain of the preternaturally dense blackness which began to form within the fog outside the circle and move in oily billows as the ritual proceeded. It appeared on the side opposite my position, but gradually drifted around the circle, sometimes seeming more dense and sometimes less. As it neared me I could discern minute pinpoints of light within it, like a swarm of radiant bees.

The blackmailer had completed his ritual and now stood quietly in an attitude of watchfulness, alternately looking toward the black cloud and staring blankly as though listening for some faint sound. I heard the distant crunch of a footstep on the gravelly path from the village and knew that my client was approaching. The blackmailer seemed to hear it too and smiled.

By now the black cloud had reached the point to my right and behind the man where I had smashed one star-stone and removed another, which I carried in an inside pocket of my coat. I could see the cloud bulge inward, as though purposefully probing against some unseen barrier. The man was staring intently in the direction of my client and did not see the great tendril of star-flected blackness move toward him through the gap I had made in his carefully arranged circle of star-stones, and began screaming only when it reached and engulfed him. Before my eyes he disappeared into the thing, though I could still hear his hoarse animal cries. As the blackness withdrew from the circle and disappeared the voice receded and seemed to be coming from above, though whether this was some strange acoustical effect of the fog I cannot say.

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

Naturally I returned and went over the site meticulously in daylight, but I found no trace, no clue to what had happened. The man never reappeared, alive or dead, and my client and his peculiar heirlooms were never troubled again.

These excerpts were written in, or prior to, 1905. At that time, if Pons was not writing his monograph with tongue firmly lodged in cheek, he believed in what his researches had revealed concerning the "Cthulhu Mythos."

By January of 1930, Pons has seemed to have done a complete reversal concerning his knowledge of the "Cthulhu Mythos." He tells Parker that the catalogue is a hoax, meaning the books themselves are a hoax, and, in effect, that there is no basis in fact to substantiate the "Cthulhu Mythos."

Then, in 1931, Pons's second monograph was published, of which the preface is hereby appended:

In the annals of crime, cases involving magic, witchcraft and traffic with supernatural powers are by no means rare; to the connoisseur of crime one need only mention the schemes of "Count Cagliostro" or the scandalous affairs of Aleister Crowley. The great majority of these are easily explained in terms of ordinary fraud and of the unbalanced mentality naturally attracted to such things. But there remains a residue which teases the intellect and haunts the imagination.

The cases I have encountered in my own career may all be dismissed as the result of mundane human criminality except for a small number. The disturbing feature of these, however, is that they all have a common link in a body of lore known in occult and scholarly circles as the "Cthulhu Mythos."

I first became aware of these apparently outlandish ideas in the wake of the hideous case of Threadgill, the notorious necrophile, whose fiendish activities were conducted with such maniacal cunning as to elude the official police for many years. At his death the case was treated with circumspection by the press, and his crimes described only vaguely as the most repulsive results of mental aberration. But I had learned that the man had combined the sort of insanity documented by Kraft-Ebing with attempts at necromancy, guided by a collection of recherche books. Unfortunately his library was destroyed in the fire in which he perished, save only a handful of notes which I carried out with me. They consisted of copies of lengthy inscriptions in an unknown tongue, labeled "Eltdown Shards," together with a partial translation. They purported to be the records of visitors from beyond this planet who visited the

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

earth long eons ago. The earth had by that time a long history of contact with extraplanetary life, in particular a group of fearsome creatures referred to as the "Old Ones." Naturally I dismissed this at the time as a ludicrous imposture.

My next inkling of the "mythos" came in the affair of the murderous astrologer Hawthorne. His criminal depredations were all too real and all too human, but like many of his kind he combined blatant chicanery with a genuine belief in the supernatural. Three days before his execution he wrote a will leaving me his library. It consisted for the most part of preposterous quackery, but there were two books which did not share the hysterical gullibility of the others. They were *Cultes des Goules* by the Comte d'Erlette and *Unaussprechlichen Kulturen* by the Baron von Junzt. They were obscurely written and difficult to interpret but undoubtedly shared many concepts with the "Eltdown Shards."

My next and most important exposure to the "Cthulhu Mythos" again proved nothing; but this time the documentary evidence was more impressive. I encountered it while pursuing a criminal genius whose exploits have been substantially recorded by my loyal biographer, but about whom a great deal more may be told someday, and about whom a very great deal may never be known. In the course of an unauthorized visit to his quarters during the small hours of the morning I discovered an ancient manuscript written in Arabic. I have made a special study of documents of all ages with regard to identification and authenticity, and can vouch for the age and Arabian peninsular origin of the book. This genius among criminals had translated the bulk of it into English. I was deeply impressed by this, for aside from his strange compulsive inclination toward criminality the man was a logician and scholar of the first water. From the time and effort he had expended one could safely deduce that he knew of additional facts which made the book of more importance than legend or fraud. In the brief moments at my disposal, I read of the Great Old Ones, including great Cthulhu of the ocean deeps, Hastur of the starry void and the formidable Yog-Sothoth among others, who once ruled the earth and waited with malign patience to rule again. The treatise included rituals of magic for contacting these creatures and creating the necessary conditions for their return. Sandwiched in among the pages of translation was an apparently unrelated item, several pages of mathematical calculations, in the man's own hand, based on the existence of more than three spatial dimensions.

The translations were labelled "Necronomicon," which intrigued me because I had heard of this rare book before and believed, on seemingly good evidence, that it was a fictional invention. But this formidably ancient book was quite real, and its translator was no gull or

PONS AND THE CTHULHU MYTHOS (CONT)

fantasist.

It was many years before I found the leisure to follow out these threads and track down the obscure sources which detail the Cthulhu Mythos. I found with monotonous regularity that books had been stolen or destroyed, and often had to exercise the greatest ingenuity in gaining access to carefully guarded copies. This monograph is the result of that investigation, and I trust that it will stimulate interest, if not acceptance, and point the way to further research. I believe that I have demonstrated, at the very least, that subterranean groups of dangerously fanatic cultists do exist, and that enough hints exist to warrant reexamining our limited concept of the earth's vast and awesome history.

And a short quotation from the body of the monograph:

It is said that the middle American town of Harkness is populated by the spawn of Othuyeg, the doom-walker who was imprisoned by the Elder Ones. It is also said that J'Cak Iggarthan, author of the *Black Book of the Skull* lives here, and has done so ever since Quy vanished except when he must take off for some esoteric journey.

It is obvious from the preface to his second monograph, that Pons did, indeed, believe the truth of his researches into the "Cthulhu Mythos." It is believed that the two monographs were intended for students of the "Cthulhu Mythos," whereas "The Adventure of the Six Silver Spiders" was intended for a wider audience, it was best to put forth the "truth" that the "Cthulhu Mythos" was a complete hoax, in order to protect mankind from the horrors masked by that terminology. In effect, there is no discrepancy between the monographs and the written-up adventure. Parker had been living with Pons for at least a year when this adventure occurred. There is no doubt that Parker went along with the facade in order to protect humanity from his own bumbling novice.

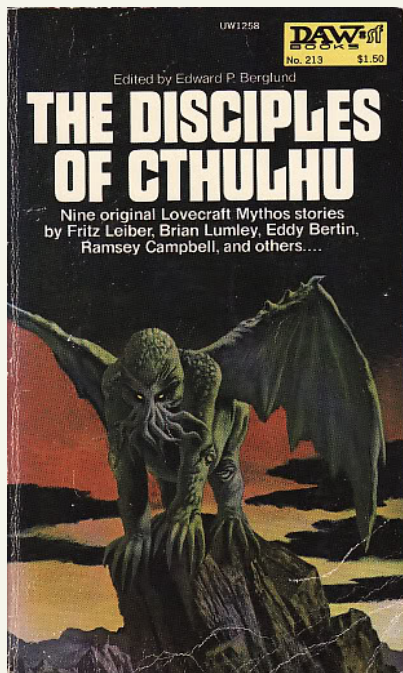
As an afterthought, it should be noted that the quotations from both monographs point out adventures that Dr. Lyndon Parker never got around to writing up. A pity that these adventures will never be seen in the public press!

EDITORIAL NOTE: When it was pointed out to the good doctors that the first and second excerpts from Pons's first monograph mention adventures that occurred after he started his private inquiry practice, they stated that they had erred in thinking the three extracts had been deleted from the monograph and now assume that Pons had been proposing a revised monograph for subsequent publication, which never came about. Or, if it did, no copies are known to exist.

IN RE: SOLAR PONS & CTHULHU MYTHOS

It is no surprise that there is a connection between Solar Pons and the Cthulhu Mythos. Pons' creator, August Derleth, did more to preserve Robert E. Howard's Cthulhu stories and promote them than any other. While critics abound at the imprint Derleth put on the Cthulhu Mythos and his 'management' of them, he most certainly kept them from obscurity. As the in depth preceding essay, *Solar Pons and the Cthulhu Mythos* discussed, Derleth sprinkled a few Cthulhu references into the Pons stories. That essay delves deeper into the subject, as does my own *Pons and Cthulhu: More Than Just a Hobby?*, which will be in the next issue of the *Gazette*.

I don't know every writer in the Ponsian world, but I'm not familiar with the names of Eric Von Konnenburg or Pierre de Hammis. That's because Von Konnenburg is actually Walter C. DeBill Jr. and de Hammis is Edward Berglund Jr.. Debill Jr. authored a story for *The Disciples of Cthulhu*, a well reviewed collection of H.P. Lovecraft-esque stories, which Berglund edited. It is cool to see Cthulhu fans crossing over to write a Pons related piece.



SOLAR PONS & SA- ROB (BERY) PRESS BY BOB BYRNE

In the early nineteen seventies, Basil Copper wrote a novel-length Solar Pons adventure. However, Arkham House chose not to publish it. Copper finally found an outlet in 2004 when Sarob Press published *Solar Pons & The Devil's Claw*. A total of 250 copies were printed at \$45 and \$95 for the regular and deluxe editions, respectively.

The following year, Sarob published *Solar Pons: The Final Cases*. This contained five stories previously released by Copper, but revised by the author. Copper had not been pleased with the original, edited versions of the stories. The book also contained an original Sherlock Holmes tale by Copper. A total of 275 copies were printed at \$49.50 and \$115 for the regular and deluxe editions, respectively. *The Final Cases* did not have a cover or dust jacket; it was issued between pictorial boards.

By producing such a limited print run, an artificially inflated demand and value was created. In essence, Sarob Press determined the value of the books, not the market place. Since both books sold out through pre-orders, Sarob Press was certainly the winner. Unfortunately, fans of Copper's Solar Pons tales were the losers.

Solar Pons fan are fortunate if they can locate a single copy of *Devil's Claw* available for purchase, and they are extremely lucky if the asking price is less than \$125. *The Final Cases*, being the more recent volume, might be located for under \$100. Though, maybe not.

S O L A R P O N S & S A R O B (B E R Y) P R E S S (C O N T)

Sarob should be commended for making these Basil Copper stories available. But they have not done a service to the majority of Solar Pons fans. Because of the limited demand and high price, only the first edition book collector or Pons fanatic is likely to ever own a copy. For example, the reader whose Pons library consists primarily of the Pinnacle paperback releases is unlikely to buy these books.

It appears that Sarob chose to publish these Basil Copper books in order to create collectible editions priced beyond most readers' means. Since there are no other copies of these stories in print, that is disappointing. Readers can only hope that some other outlet will become available, as with the Pons Pinnacle paperbacks in the nineteen seventies. Or, on a larger scale, perhaps a collection of all the Copper stories will be issued in a

multi-volume set some day. (See below)

For now, these stories remain unread by nearly all Solar Pons fans. Sarob Press has produced two rare Solar Pons books, authored by Basil Copper. They sold out quickly at high prices. Sarob should be pleased.

Hark! It has been announced that Stephen Jones, author of an award winning biography of Basil Copper, will be editing a COMPLETE collection of all of Copper's Pons stories for release in 2014! Solar Pons will once more tread the London streets of our imagination

Les Edwards' marvelous full illustration for the cover of '*Solar Pons & the Devil's Claw*'. Edwards said that Basil Copper insisted Pons resemble Peter Cushing. I can believe that!



HE KEEPS MY MIND FROM BETTER THINGS...

The above cartoon appeared in an issue of Punch Magazine. I feel it does a great job conveying Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's attitude towards his most famous creation. Doyle wrote Holmes stories to make money: Nothing wrong with that. But he had very little affection for his creation. He famously wrote, "He takes my mind from better things." Which meant he was "stuck" writing Holmes stories when he would much rather have been writing historical fiction in the vein of his (self-described) more important works, like Sir Nigel and The White Company.

The latter part of the Sherlockian Canon contain more mundane efforts and reflect an author engaged in a com-

mercial venture (no, not every tale: but compare those later stories with those in *The Adventures* and *The Memoirs*).

Contrast that with August Derleth's professed love of the Holmes stories, which inspired him to write his Solar Pons pastiches. As Peter Ruber wrote in the introduction to *The Final Adventures of Solar Pons*;

The majority of the Solar Pons stories were plotted more carefully than the Sherlock Holmes stories. Sir Arthur viewed his creation as a monster that distracted the reading public from his more serious efforts. Derleth never had such delusions; he took a genuine pleasure, even late in life, hatching new plots for the sage of number 7b Praed Street. To critics who proclaimed Derleth should be devoting his talents to serious fiction and history, he often replied, "I would rather be a living hack than a dead genius."

How different these two authors approached their fictional detectives. And while Sir Arthur is much better remembered, that is no judgment on their literary merits: Derleth's writings regarding his home state of Wisconsin are considered standards to be sought for.

Perhaps someone will draw an alternate version of this cartoon, with a small Derleth look up with a genuine smile at a large Pons.



THE BEST SUBSTITUTE FOR SHERLOCK HOLMES KNOWN

- Vincent Starrett

The Solar Pons Gazette is the free, on-line Newsletter of www.SolarPons.com, the world's only internet site dedicated to Solar Pons.

For questions, comments, or to contribute to the next issue of *The Solar Pons Gazette*, contact editor Bob Byrne at Bob@SolarPons.com.

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To learn more about August Derleth, visit the August Derleth Society's website at: <http://www.derleth.org/>

