



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

lock Holmes was 42 years old and Dr. John H. Watson 44.

Main Characters:

Robert Ferguson, tea broker and father of two. Mrs. Ferguson, Peruvian wife of Robert, mother of a baby boy and stepmother to Jack. Jack Ferguson, Robert's seemingly disabled elder 15-year-old son. Dolores, a long-time friend and servant of Mrs. Ferguson. Mrs. Mason, devoted nurse to baby Ferguson.

Notable Quotes:

"Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy."

"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson. It was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared."

"The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply."

"I never get your limits, Watson. There are unexplored possibilities about you."

"The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England."

"One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them."

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An Inquiry into:

"The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire"

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"The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* on January 1924. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

As evidenced from the table, most of our chronologists agree on the year this case took place. If, as the majority claims, the case took place in 1896, then at the time Sher-

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	November 19
Baring-Gould	Thursday, November 19, 1896
Bell	Friday, November 19, 1897
Blakeney	November 19, 1896 (or 1902)
Brend	Late November 1896
Christ	Friday, November 20, 1896
Dakin	Thursday, November 19, 1896
Folsom	Thursday, November 19, 1896
Hall	November 19, 1896
Keefauver	Tuesday November 19, 1901
Klinger	1896
Zeisler	November 19, 1896 (or 1901)

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

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About the Giant Rat of Sumatra

Of all the lost cases of Sherlock Holmes, for most this is the one that first comes to mind when considering the disappearance of that irreplaceable tin box. We have, of course, no idea regarding what Holmes actually meant by “the giant rat of Sumatra.” Did he refer to an actual oversized rodent? Or was it the sobriquet of an Asian crime lord?

In any case, whatever the chronicle was, Holmes further titillates us by describing it as “a story for which the world is not yet prepared.”

Over my life, I have acquired some experience with rats in and out of the laboratory (as a boy I had a couple as pets). I must say that when it comes to the matter of size, I’ve yet to run across a specimen of the species that could by any extent of the imagination be described as a “giant.” Although it is true that residing in any port city of the world one may observe rats of sufficient size to



“We’re going to need a bigger cat.”

make the toughest cat hesitate, the largest critter that may be described as a rat—or at least as being rat-like—weighs about nine pounds (4 kg). The creature does, indeed look like a large rat and to the ratty community, it would appear gigantic.

Some zoologically inclined Canon scholars have identified our reputedly humongous rodent as probably being the large bamboo rat, Sumatran rat, or Indomalayan rat (*Rhizomys sumatrensis*), that is a member of the family *Spalacidae* which is found frolicking in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar,



Thailand, and Vietnam. It can reach lengths of nearly 20 inches (51 cm), with an 8-inch (20 cm) tail, and can weigh as much as 9 pounds (4 kg). A peaceful vegetarian delighting in bamboo roots as well as cultivated tapioca and sugarcane it is, in turn, hunted as the main ingredient for a popular dish of those localities.

Regardless of all the above, however, even if one were one to encounter a snarling, stomping herd of these hefty distant cousins of Mickey intent on wiping out humanity, they would hardly make for “a story for which the world is not yet prepared.” Perhaps the creature referred to by our sleuth fall more into Professor Challenger’s purview.

The Extremely Odd Referral

This time, we join our friends and witness Holmes commenting to Watson about the unusual letter he received from Morrison, Morrison, and Dodd, assessors of machinery. Although on more than one occasion it has been mentioned that the Great Detective’s daily correspondence had the charm of diversity more often than not bordering on the bizarre, this communication had to have been at the top of that list. It is well-worth reviewing:

*46, Old Jewry,
Nov. 19th.
Re Vampires*

Sir:

Our client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, has made some inquiry from us in a communication of even date concerning vampires. As our firm specializes entirely upon the assessment of machinery the matter hardly comes within our purview, and we have therefore recommended Mr. Ferguson to call upon you and lay the matter before you. We have not forgotten your successful action in the case of Matilda Briggs.

We are, sir,

— Faithfully yours,

*Morrison, Morrison, and Dodd.
per E. J. C.*



What one must first wonder is why a businessman such as Robert Ferguson would choose to consult on such a matter a firm specializing on the assessment of machinery. As the company’s executive correctly indicated, the matter did not at all within their specialty.

Stranger still is the company’s suggestion to Ferguson that he consult a detective in the matter. Logically (if not the consultation of an alienist), it would have made more sense to suggest he consult the local vicar, considering that the church is the institution *par excellence* that deals with the supernatural. Unfortunately, Ferguson could not have consulted Professor

Abraham van Helsing, because the existence of Count Dracula was not revealed until a year later.

One must suspect that perhaps there are some cases (residing in the same tin box next to the story of the giant rat of Sumatra) that deal with Holmes' investigation of the supernatural; otherwise, it would not have made sense for him to include in his admirable index of references clippings about vampirism. At the time—a year before the publication of *Dracula*, as already mentioned—short stories and novels about “the living dead” were very popular: Varney the Vampire immediately comes to mind.

Still, this does not really explain why Holmes bothered to preserve information about what he apparently considered an obviously fictitious creature. Did he really mean it when he stated, “The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply”?

The Perennial Question

Holmes' Index of references is one of the mainstays of the Great Game, in that there isn't one among us who would not gladly commit several felonies in order to get a hold of this mysterious reference source.

Aside from the fact that they probably would shed some light upon some of the lost stories (including that of the giant you-know-what), their content and indexing protocol would make for fascinating study. Aside from all this the very scope of the “good old index” is also an awe-inspiring matter: it has, scattered over several volumes, varied references which provide information on sundry matters such as vampirism, Rabbis, venomous reptiles, yeggmen, and Irene Adler. Also, these volumes seem to double as a casual diary that reminds our sleuth of some of the details (people, objects, etc.) of past adventures.

Undeniably, Sherlock Holmes is the physical representation of rationality and logic. We would not see his like again until the appearance of Mister Spock who, through his Earth-born mother, claims a direct family relationship with the Great Detective.

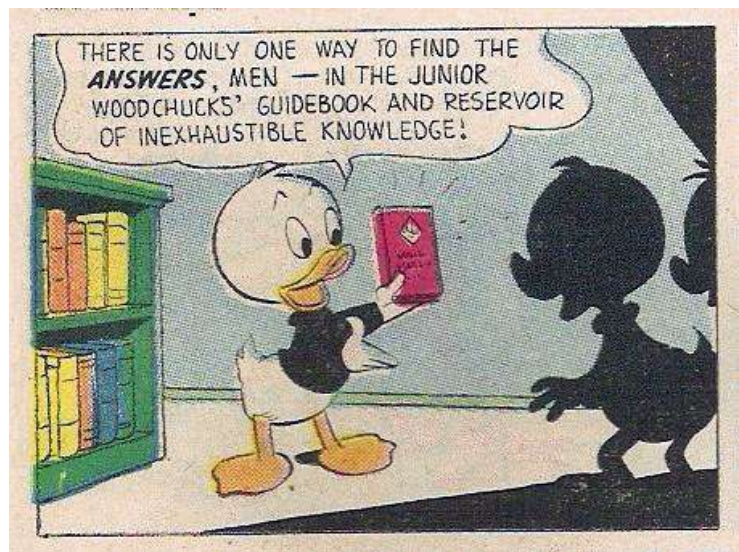
All this makes the universality of the subjects contained in Holmes' indices delightfully puzzling and intriguing. Whenever I consider their extent, I am reminded of Donald Duck's nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie, who were the proud possessors of the *Junior Woodchuck's Guidebook*, a small tome which contained detailed information about practically everything in the universe.

By no means should this be considered a criticism of our sleuth's reference files; to a certain extent we all squirrel away—often useless—facts. Apropos enough, while going through my notes in preparation for this case, I came across a factoid I had set down in years past, which revealed that vampire bats have a special enzyme in their saliva that prevents blood from clotting, helping them to keep the flow going while feeding.

Appropriately enough, its discoverer named it “Draculin.”

The Passionate Tropics

Although Watson is careful to minutely record and describe the peculiar behavior of exotic foreigners, such as Mrs. Ferguson, he does not even blink over the remarks in Mr. Ferguson's letter such as, “The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion”



This is unusual on Watson's part—and somewhat disappointing—because he had to have realized that it had to have been Ferguson who asked the lady to be his wife. It is impossible to even suggest



that he was unaware that she was not English or not have known anything about her religious beliefs; after all, not too many Roman Catholics masquerade as Church of England members!

However, were one is to be scrupulously fair, the fact remains that the lady acted illogically by not immediately telling her husband right that his elder son was attempting to murder their son. Undoubtedly, had she been more forthcoming, much grief (hers, especially) would have been avoided. However, as far as Canonical damsels go, her reaction and behavior are not particularly tropical; let us not forget Mrs. Cubitt in DANC, for example. Had she acted differently, she would not have lost her husband and would have saved herself a shot through the head.

The bulk of the blame, however, overwhelmingly lies on Ferguson's side. There is very little in his attitude to recommend him as an ideal husband. Consider how dismissively he refers to his wife in writing:

The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their union as a mistake. He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore or understand. This was the more painful as she was as loving a wife as a man could have—to all appearance absolutely devoted.

Ferguson's complaint of a "separation of interests and of feelings" is outrageously unfair considering that he appears to have taken a remarkably indifferent attitude towards the feelings and needs of the young woman he wooed and married. He unilaterally judges her instead of being supportive and attempting to discover what was really behind her actions. Unlike the pathetic Mrs. Gibson (also of a wild tropical nature!) in THOR, the lady was not older than her husband and there was no tempting governess. As icing on this apathetic cake of a man, he concedes that she was "as loving a wife as a man could have—to all appearance absolutely devoted."

Did he have *any* feelings? Had he granted his poor lady even a miniscule part of the consideration and interest that he showered upon his murderous son, the situation would not have deteriorated to such an extent, requiring an intervention by Sherlock Holmes himself to clear it.

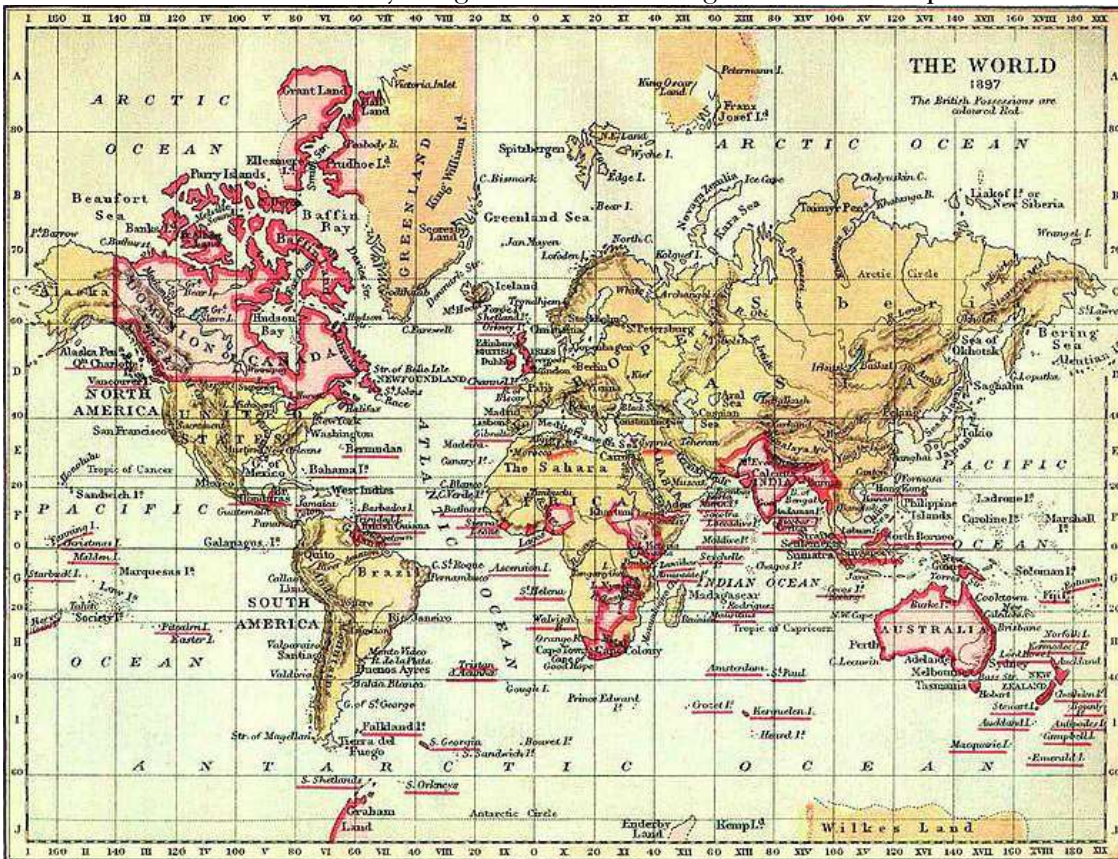
Aside from his wife's reticence to reveal his elder son's perversion, Ferguson alone bears the heaviest portion of the blame in this matter, both for leaving his wife abandoned and defenseless, and for his acquiescence to "poor little Jack's" whims.

The Imperial Provincial Outlook

There is no question that human beings are an amalgam of contrary stuff.

At its height, the British Empire was the largest empire in western history and, for over a century, the foremost global power. It held sway over 458 million people, fully 23 percent of the world population, and it covered 13,700,000 mi² (35,500,000 km²), 24 percent of the planet's total land area.

Considering these statistics, it is always astonishing to consider just how provincial even well-educated Victorians could be. Anything that was not English whether a person or thing was automatically



The red areas mark the extent of the British Empire in 1897

viewed with the deepest of suspicions; this attitude is somewhat reminiscent to the one still existing in modern Japan, where the word for foreigner, *gaijin*, means “outsider” as well as “barbarian” in some contexts.

Thus, in Victorian England a foreigner was someone at best to be viewed with suspicion, or at worst considered a barbarian until proven otherwise; the story of Anna Leonowens, who became governess

in the Royal Court of Siam (now Thailand) during the 1860s depicts this attitude well. Siam risked being taken over by the British because its king was alleged to have been a barbarian.

This unsophisticated attitude oftentimes extended even to other Europeans. This certainly presents a contradiction, as the British were used to dealing with many races and cultures and even the Royal Family is not exactly 100 percent English.

This was not unique. The Roman Empire (the only other western empire comparable in vastness to Great Britain's) held pretty much the same outlook, with the possible exception of their attitude towards the enslaved Greeks, whose culture they envied. Practically every child of a well-to-do Roman family had to have a learned Greek slave as a tutor. Amongst the intelligentsia of the time, there was the affectation of Greek being preferred over Latin; a situation very similar to French being the language of choice over Russian in the court of the Tsars.

We find this provincial outlook reflected across the Canon. Consider the passionate Latin suicide in THOR, for example. Strange (read, “different”) behavior was considered un-English and mostly attributed to foreigners such as Mrs. Ferguson, who was (horrors!) Peruvian. Ferguson's letter with comments about his wife clearly displays this attitude. Then there is CREE: “There was not much, but there was enough—an empty phial, another nearly full, a hypodermic syringe, several letters in a crabbed, *foreign* [italics mine] hand.”

It is almost 100 percent certain that Mrs. Ferguson was Roman Catholic and not Church of England. The description, “alien religion” says it all. Some of these attitudes persist even today: one of the girls that Prince Charles was interested in was rejected because she was Catholic, with the Crown finally selecting Princess Diana as an acceptable choice—and we all know how well that worked out.

Ferguson’s comment on his wife’s “alien religion” for me always calls to mind Athos’ reply to d’Artagnan when both were battling in La Rochelle and the young Gascon asked why they made war against the Huguenots: “Because they say the same prayers in French as we do in Latin,” answered the taciturn musketeer.

The Twisted “Lil’ Jacky”

On top of his other many character faults, Ferguson exercised the worst possible influence upon his eldest son; he is the one to be blamed for warping his character by blindly accepting and catering to a behavior that would have been anathema for a teenager in any time. Particularly back then, a 15-year-old male should not have been treated like a child: “poor little Jack,” “the dear lad,” “little Jacky,” “the poor little inoffensive cripple.” None of this encourages self-reliance or responsibility.

Ferguson may have found it easier to behave in that accepting fashion towards his eldest son instead of accepting the reality that there were serious problems with the teen’s behavior that should have been addressed long before. Then again, Ferguson does not appear to have been much of a problem-solver, and he not only further infantilized the boy, turning him into a sociopath, but imbued him with a pathological sense of entitlement over those around him. This, in turn led to his deadly hatred of the new wife as well as considering his baby half-brother a usurper.

By allowing this behavior, Ferguson showed himself to be as good a father as he was a husband. According to Watson, the boy would embrace his father with “the abandon of a loving girl,” coo and nest his head on his father’s breast. One would have expected Ferguson to have done something to rectify this behavior long before the happenings described in the story. While it is true that if, in reality, the boy was crippled, the army or navy would have been out of bounds, a good boy’s school would have done wonders, attuning his behavior to his chronological age while teaching him discipline. Instead of attempting to remedy the situation, Ferguson felt embarrassed by his son’s behavior when he cooed and nestled his head on his breast.

“Little Jacky’s” behavior would have been considered warped in any time, but particularly so during the Victorian Era. A 15-year-old boy was considered an adult and expected to act accordingly.

Lord Nelson joined the Royal Navy as midshipman when he was 12, some did so at even an earlier age. At Jacky’s age boys soldiered in the ranks of the Army, were studying to acquire a profession or apprenticed to learn a trade, or were already working.

Ferguson obviously recoiled from this problem. Early on, he should have taken measures to try to toughen up his son well before the situation became so extreme. As it was, in no small way he aided in the creation of a heartless, resentful, and dangerous creature, which endeavored to commit fratri-



Painting of an unknown young Royal Navy midshipman.

cide. Regardless of his handicap (which he very likely exaggerated to his advantage), Holmes' suggestion that "a year at sea" would help straighten things out is valid. Muscular discipline exercised by men he could not wrap around his little finger would undoubtedly work wonders.

An Inconsistency?

In this case we see Holmes breaking one of his own basic rules—that of it being a capital mistake to speculate when having insufficient data. Uncharacteristically, he tells Ferguson that "One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them." Isn't this a contradiction to his dictum?

A Very Satisfying Case

Although Holmes does not fully exercise his detecting abilities, relying instead on his ability to read people (and dogs), he quickly realized what had been going on, once revealing himself as not simply an expert investigator but also a profound student of mankind. His contemptuous dismissal of the possibility of a vampire is characteristic of his reasoning nature towards anything dealing with the occult—just as in HOUN: "A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing."



What else happened in 1896:

Empire

Jameson Raid failure in South Africa provokes crisis; British negotiations with Boers (to 1899) fail.

Kaiser Wilhelm's telegram to Kruger, congratulating him on the defeat of the Jameson Raid.

Matabele Revolt suppressed (1896-97).

Protectorate established in Sierra Leone and East Africa.

Conquest of the Sudan begins with the start of Kitchener's campaign against the Madhi (1896-99).

Anglo-French treaty settles boundaries in Siam.

Sudanese railway extended to Wadi Haifa.

Widespread famine in India, to 1897.

Britain

Hotel Cecil, the Strand, built.

National Portrait Gallery moves to present site in Trafalgar Square.

Beginning of period of rising prices and falling wages (until 1914).

Conciliation Act: boards can settle industrial disputes if both sides are willing.

First all-steel English building erected at West Hartlepool.

Royal Victorian Order founded as Personal Order of Sovereign.

World

First modern Olympic Games are held at Athens.

Klondike Gold Rush in Canada.

France annexes Madagascar.

Van Houten's Franchise Bill extends the Dutch franchise.

French Tunisian protectorate recognized by Italy.

Italians are defeated by Menelek of Abyssinia at Battle of Adwa, resulting in Treaty of Addis-Ababa.

Massacre of Armenians by Kurds and Circassians supported by the Sultan.

Insurrection in Crete against Turkish rule.

Cassini Treaty: China gives Russia the right to build a railway through Manchuria to Port Arthur.

Russian newspapers granted temporary licenses; imported books and newspapers strictly censored.

First public film exhibition, in U.S.

Art

Wells publishes *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

Giacomo Puccini débuts *La Bohème* at Turin.

Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Maxime Dethomas*.

R. Strauss debuts *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

Sir James Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, sketches of Scottish village life.

Science and Technology

Nobel Prizes started, for physics, physiology or medicine, chemistry, literature, furtherance of the cause of peace.

Guglielmo Marconi demonstrates on Salisbury Plain the practicability of wireless telegraphy.

Samuel Langley (U.S.A.) successfully flies a steam-driven model aircraft.

J.J. Thompson identifies the electron, though not by name.

Emile Achard first describes paratyphoid fever.

Antoine Henri Becquerel, observes radiation from uranium affects photographic plates; discovery of radioactivity.

Rehn, of Frankfort, sutures a heart wound; beginning of heart surgery.

Zeeman observes that light emitted by a substance placed in a magnetic field undergoes changes.

Next week's case: 3GAR.

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly..."

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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