

# The Cosmology of Sherlock Holmes

Edited from the original text  
by Dr. John Watson by James  
Wylder



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## Foreword

Being a publisher in the US, it seemed odd I would ever be in the amazing position I've found myself in: being able to publish a new, never before discovered manuscript detailing the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson. While other manuscripts have slowly come to light in the years since the death of Arthur Conan-Doyle, most have (understandably) been found in the United Kingdom. Most of these documents have had a very obvious reason for their lack of publication, and this one is no different. One can only imagine Conan-Doyle squirming in his seat as his publisher turned the pages on this manuscript watching their face grow more and more confused.

Our journey to finding this manuscript starts exactly where you'd think it would considering Arcbeatle Press' history: with getting obscure licenses.

We were emailing back and forth with someone, trying to get the rights to an obscure 1980's character who featured in a single reference in a short story on the back of a Cereal Box that was only distributed in a single Manchester grocery store for three days before being pulled from shelves for botulism contamination. Many people on the internet were certain that this incredible get would be our ticket to fame and fortune, and several demanded our complete exclusion from any database of publishers due to the sheer reckless greed of it all. I had reached the point in the evening where I stared up at the ceiling and wondered how I even know

about this cereal box character and why I did this for my career (7:46 PM, EST), when I saw I'd gotten a new email. I shot up, and clicked on it.

Subject: Lost Manuscript (?)

I braced myself in case the letter was yet another one detailing exactly what Satan would do to me for writing a new story featuring Bix Wedge: Star Hero, instead of letting the person writing the email write it. But I was surprised to find it was something else:

“Dear Mx. Wylder,

As the proprietor of Arcbeatle Press, I have heard you have helped to preserve many important works that no one cares about beyond a small group of passionate fans who wouldn't be enough to operate a coffee shop if you put them in one room.”

Rude, but I'd hear them out.

“This is of course, as everyone on the internet knows, the true path to riches and fortune. So I know you will be disappointed to hear that I have a long lost manuscript for one of the most popular characters in the history of literature. If you would hear me out, perhaps you could deign to give me a little of your time on this topic.

Heirum P. Moneybags, collector.”

I paused, and blinked, and replied:

“Actually I am very interested in a very popular thing. I'd be more than willing to help.”

In reply, I was sent a date, and a series of coordinates, which when entered into Google Maps, told me was a parking garage in Rosemont, Illinois. Sure, I guess.

I drove there, leaving several hours early to account for construction, and then had to decide whether or not preserving history was actually worthwhile because the Parking Garage had a Ten-Dollar minimum charge just for parking. With a sigh, I decided I'd already driven three hours to get here so I might as well suck it up, and parked. As I

slipped out of my car, I heard someone call from the other side of the garage.

“You Wylder?”

I walked to the center of the garage and stared my compatriot off. “Maybe I am.”

“Well maybe I have something for you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Well maybe I’d like to see it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

The figure paused, and then shuffled around for a minute. “Okay, but are you actually Wyder? I have trouble reading these scenarios.”

“Oh, sorry, yeah its me!”

“Great,” they pulled a gun.

“Okay, that’s really not necessary.”

“Anything is necessary in the hardcore world of licensing forgotten properties and characters for a niche fiction market.”

I grimaced. He was right, I couldn’t argue with that. “What’s this about? I was told this was popular?”

He laughed, “What, you think this is some world renown thing that will immediately make people interested in buying it? As if. We don’t do small time stuff like that. No, this one is unique, because we’re about to reveal a secret to the world.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“....”

“.....”

“Okay but seriously what is going on?”

“Sorry, okay so... listen, yes, this is a popular document, but... it can’t see the light of day. It turns out it actually has the first appearance of a character who was previously thought to only have appeared on a cereal box.”

I narrowed my eyes. "...You don't mean... It couldn't possibly be... a character who appeared on a cereal box only distributed to three grocery stores in Manchester?"

He grinned wide, his eyes wild. "Just the same. Nations would kill for this." He threw aside a useless briefcase of certificates of shares in Apple, and the ownership of several Marvel characters, and held up a manilla folder. "In here, in here is real power."

I knew one thing for certain.

I couldn't let him get his hands on it.

"You know as well as I that only one of us is—"

A Prius came up the ramp into the garage and we both moved out of the way as the driver slowly drove past us. Creeping by. The driver waved to us both in gratitude and we waved back. Then we got back into position.

"...Sorry where was I?"

"You were about to threaten me?"

"Right..." I stood there awkwardly. "Honestly I've sort of lost the vibe, want to just do this?"

He nodded, "Sounds good to me."

Three hours later I drove away from Rosemont, the flames blazing in my rearview mirror, and the manilla folder on my passenger seat.

Finally, I got home, opened it up, and realized that it was one of those manilla folders that only had one side that kept the paper in it, and it had dropped off somewhere. I drove three hours back, and slid under the police tapelines to search. After finding nothing, I went back to my car and found it had just slid under the seat. Wacky times!

Anyway, after another three hour drive I started reading the document, and immediately called my former vice-president.

"You have to read this, this is incredible, we really found the holy grail here?"

There was a long pause, "You do realize I don't work for you anymore and this is an international call—"

“Listen—listen this changes everything though.”

She scoffed, “What, did you find something pointless like the rights to *The Lord of the Rings*?”

“No, something that matters. I found out the truth. A character from the back of a cereal box in the 1980’s or something? They’re actually public domain.”

There was a long pause. “I’ll get on the next flight.”

After that she flew right back because we didn’t actually have anything to talk about that we couldn’t do over chat, but it was a very exciting day.

And now, after our hard work, you can now enjoy a lost work that hasn’t been seen for over a century. I hope you enjoy it as much as we did in transcribing it.

I’d like to thank the most important contributor to this book: French press coffee. You were there for me when no one else was.

XOXO

James Wylder

Arcbeatle Somethingrather  
battle...”

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Watson

## 1. The Adventure of the Empty Heart

It was on a rather balmy day in April, when I arrived back home to find the house oddly quiet. So often there was some sort of commotion or another lately, even if it was just my friend Sherlock Holmes bowing away at his Violin, and our housekeeper Mrs. Hudson grumbling in displeasure. I felt a brief pang of worry; the silence reminded me of walking into the home I had lived in with my late wife before she passed. I pushed the thought away as best I could. Opening the door to our rooms, I found Holmes sitting in his armchair, leaned back, puffing away on a pipe he held in one hand, as the other displayed in front of him a telegram that had caused him to go into a mode of incredible focus. His brow furrowed down as he read and reread the telegram, and while I set my bags down rather loudly, he did not respond at first.

Finally, with something of a start, he turned to look at me. “Ah, welcome back. I’m afraid I must trouble you immediately with a problem that requires both of our areas of expertise, you can retrieve your doctor’s bags again, as we’ll be needing them.”

It was my turn to furrow my brow, “You could have said that before I’d started putting this away.” But I argued no further, and gathered my things together as we talked. “What’s the nature of the case this time?”

Holmes rose, and strode about the room as he spoke, his eyes showing he was still deep in thought. “We’re to examine a girl. Inspector Grayson took her in, and Scotland yard is perplexed by her. She is dressed in clothes that seem to match no nationality they are familiar with—and while I know that

the police do not have an encyclopaedic knowledge of such things, I'm inclined to believe them as they've never expressed this form of confusion before. She speaks fluent English, but in an accent that sounds more like that of Americans in the North, but again, not quite. She also intersperses words not known to anyone, and then explains each of them with a tone of exasperation. Most curiously, she appears to be from Asia."

I gave a huff of a laugh, "You say curiously, but wouldn't that explain the other oddities?"

Holmes gave a smile that was not unkind, but perhaps a little patronising. "My dear Watson, there are many countries in Asia, but she claims to be from one which does not exist."

That was indeed curious, and so in short time we had hired a carriage and made our way to Scotland Yard. Gregson met us at the front, and took us back to a room—rather than a cell—while regaling us with some meaningless prattle about how odd the whole scenario was, before opening the door to reveal the girl in question.

Her black hair was surprisingly short, cut just below the jaw, and her dark eyes had perked up from a state of intense doldrum upon our entrance. Her clothing was bizarre: she had no hat, and wore a bright orange garment on her torso like a thin coat that ended at her waist, two pockets near the waistline, some sort of fastening system in a line down the front, and also hooded, for good measure. She wore men's trousers, of a tough black fabric. Her shoes were also colourful: red canvas with white rubber soles.

"...Hello. I take it I'm in for another round of questioning? Can I have some more tea, if that's the case?" She paused, as if realising she was missing something and then finished with, "Please?"

"Gregson, if you would be so kind as to oblige her request," Holmes swept in, taking a seat in front of her. Holmes looked down a page of notes, then set it down as though it had been useless. "My name is Sherlock Holmes, this is my companion Doctor Watson. We've been asked to consult on the confusion surrounding you."

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She looked between the two of us. "...No way. Get out of town. Wait—do you say that—do you have that expression, get out of town? I didn't just sound like I was insulting you—no wait—forget I rambled. But—I'm not sure if this is all real yet, but if you are Holmes and Doctor Watson, I'm a huge fan. And also have an incredible amount of questions."

Holmes raised an eyebrow but remained otherwise impassive. "You have already raised several questions of my own. But let us start with the basics—as while I see the members of Scotland Yard have done their best, it is not adequate. So, what is your name?"

"My name is Jhe Sang Mi—wait—you use family name last here, right? So... Sang Mi Jhe? My friends call me Kalingkata though."

Holmes nodded. "It appears that several incorrect assumptions about your nationality have been made, but unless I am mistaken, your name comes from Chosön, the Land of the Morning Calm?"

She squinted a moment, her mind turning like the gears of a watch till they clicked into place. "Oh—I think that's an antiquated form of Korea? That's where my ancestors are from, but I'm from Gongen. The city of Takumi."

Holmes leaned back a little, this was clearly catching his interest. "Curious. Well then, where is this... Gongen?"

She pointed up. "You know. It's in space. Oh—wait, you call it Mars here. And don't have space travel. So that probably sounded absolutely insane—wait, no it's insane that I'd think that, this has to be some sort of... wait, you didn't slip me Delirium did you? Did Saki put you up to this?"

"I neither know a Saki, nor know what Delirium is, at least in a form which could be, as you say, slipped."

Sang Mi nodded. "Right... well, it's a drug, but that's a whole other story."

I looked to Holmes. "Some foreign name for opium?"

Holmes held a hand up to me that was clear enough in his desire for me to not say anything that would embarrass him

further. “I believe it’s unrelated to the matter at hand. Ah, here is the tea.”

Miss Sang Mi picked up the cup that was set in front of her, only for the handle to immediately snap, and send a small amount of tea onto her hooded jacket. She said several indecipherable words in a language I was unfamiliar with, and the attendant apologised while trying to help her wipe it up, which took less time than anticipated. And when it was done there was no wet stain on her jacket. As a new teacup was set in front of her, I could see Holmes' eyes glittering. “Let us look at the information at hand. This young lady is wearing clothing from no discernable nation or place. Perhaps it is an elaborately constructed costume, but in that case, what exactly are the materials? As you just saw, her jacket is not only too bright to be of any familiar dye, and reacts to the light in a way fabric simply does not, but also repels water while feeling soft to the touch like a downy pillow. Her shoes are also unfamiliar, the manufacturing process that made them is unknown to anyone in the British Empire, nor are we aware of any process anywhere else capable of producing them. But the biggest clue is something that I have kept from you Watson, for which I apologise. Could one of you please return the lady’s mirror?”

A constable rushed off, and returned holding a strange rectangular mirror—only the glass was black, almost like obsidian. The back of it was also some sort of rubber, and had writing on it in a foreign script that was neither that of China, Arabia, or Russia. The girl took it back eagerly, she had clearly felt anxious to be deprived of it. At the time, I assumed that it was due to vanity, though I had seen far clearer mirrors for ladies many times.

“Now, if you would leave the room?” Holmes looked at the constables and Gregson, who did not look pleased at this.

“Now look here Holmes, we—”

“I guarantee you that I can reach the cause of this problem, if only you trust me this far with some privacy for merely five minutes.”

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Gregson sighed, and relented. The door shut, and Holmes and Sang Mi began a stare off.

“Miss Jhe, could you please cause that device to eliminate light?”

She looked at him curiously. “...If this is the 1800s which I’m starting to suspect it is, won’t this cause problems?”

“I see you have already figured out what I have.”

I looked between them, confused. “What do you mean—what does she mean? If this is the 1800s?”

Holmes did not look away from her. She touched the mirror, and suddenly it lit up, turning colourful and bright. On it was now displayed a picture of a group of young people, all around her age, arms around each other and smiling, though obscured by several smaller images.

“That’s impossible,” I spat. “How—what is that?”

“It is nothing magic, or outside of our possible understanding. Simply out of our current one. I was able to get that machine to produce light earlier, but not able to do anything with it. I believe if you touch the mirror on the front, it changes what is on the mirror?”

She nodded, “I wouldn’t use those words specifically, but yes basically. You really are clever. So... you believe that I’m from the future on a different planet?”

“I believe that is a likely current possibility, considering the information presented. There is also another element I do not believe the police are aware of—the text on your mirror, and your jacket. I believe they are in the Hangul script, yes?”

She nodded.

“It was difficult to find a resource on such short notice, I had to send a telegram to an expert, who thankfully replied back before our return. Your jacket says “2386 Academy 27 Track and Field Team” does it not? And your mirror says, “If you are reading this, ignore me.” Am I correct?”

She laughed, “Wow. Did you do like... the whole mind palace thing to figure that out? That’s wild. Wow.”

“Mind Palace?”

“They made a bunch of shows about you—like uh, stageplays but you watch them on...” she fumbled for words for a moment, “big mirrors. I’ve seen a lot of your adventures!”

Holmes actually laughed at that. “Well then, it does appear some artistic licence was taken, but I’m glad to hear my small work in investigating and studying the criminal mind lives on in memory.”

I looked between them. “You can’t honestly believe this, can you? The year Two-thousand three-hundred and eighty-six? That she... comes from the future and beyond the sky?”

“Watson, our investigation is not yet complete. I would like to hear from Miss Jhe how she arrived here, in her own words.”

She kept a tight grip on the mirror, and took a long sip of her tea with the other to steady her nerves. Her posture was terrible. “Alright... well I’d just gotten home from school. There is this boy who has a crush on me and he walked me home and kept me talking to him outside the apartment door for way longer than I’d been expecting, so I was tired and lay down on my bed. Then I felt myself... sinking down into it. I raised my arms to try to stop it, but I was falling, falling through this blue light. I came out inside of a dark room, where two figures were standing. One was dressed... well I don’t honestly know how to describe it. Bizarrely. It looked as odd to me as my clothes must look to you, but he also never left the shadows so I didn’t get a good look at his face. The other was wearing a well tailored 3-piece grey suit. He had keen eyes, he was older, but not frail. Caucasian, with grey hair. He had a strange air about him as though he knew something was about to appear, but that it was me was surprising.

“I stood up, though I staggered, I felt dizzy and nauseous, and before I could speak I heard them exchange a few words:

“It’s not what I was hoping for,” the shadowy man said.

“She’s quite interesting though, what fascinating attire.”

The shadow man scoffed, “To you maybe.”

I finally found my voice, “What’s going on, where am I? Did you kidnap me? This isn’t like a true crime thing right? I mean like—like a crime?”

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“You talk in a curious manner too,” the suited man approached me, his cane tapping on the floor as he approached me. I looked around for something to defend myself with. There wasn’t anything, the house had boarded up windows, it was a trash heap honestly. But I could see a door, and did have a trick up my sleeve.”

“Go on,” I said, invested despite myself.

She held the mirror up, “I turned the flashlight on, on this. The uh... it can make a brighter light, basically. I turned it up as bright as it would go and it blinded them for a moment, and as they lifted their hands up to shield their eyes I made a break for it. I’m a runner for my school’s team—the Track and Field team on my phone, er, mirror—and turns out I was a lot faster than either of them. The shadow one called out to his friend, and yelled his name out at him in anger as I bolted. I just kept running and running, and eventually I couldn’t run anymore and I doubled over, no idea where I was. I started wandering around trying to figure out where I was, and I guess I got reported as a suspicious character and the cops found me. I was too tired to run more so I just figured I’d have to make the best of it and... well now I’m here I guess. They had a lady do an examination which was kind of scary, but thankfully it wasn’t anything, like, weird.”

“Would you be opposed if my companion here performed his own examination? Nothing so strenuous, merely a quick observation.”

She narrowed her eyes, “Only if you open the door again.”

“Of course, at your comfort.”

Holmes opened the door, and I did a quick pass on the girl. A healthy pulse, healthy teeth... too healthy. Each was pure white, with not a sign of a cavity or extraction. I was no dentist, but I knew how unusual this was. Indeed, there was no sign of any ailment. Her health was beyond what riches could purchase. Could she really be from some time and place beyond hers? Holmes had made quite the case, but it seemed to me like believing in faeries.



Rolling her sleeves back up, she looked at me with an incredulous demeanour. "Are you satisfied, Doctor Watson?"

I nodded, "You appear to be in perfect health."

Holmes could see the doubts in my eyes, and I knew that this examination had been less for her sake than my own. Indeed, he moved on from the topic of it as quickly as he had introduced it. "Then, I have one further—and perhaps final question. You said that one of the two men shouted after the other. Was a name spoken?"

"Oh, right, yes, sorry."

"And what was the man's name?"

"He said his name was Moriarty. James Moriarty. Like the criminal. I mean, you know who he is."

"Like the criminal indeed," Holmes replied. "The only problem being, James Moriarty is dead."

\* \* \*

Holmes negotiated with Gregson to put the girl into his custody for the time being. The Inspector was hesitant, and vocalised repeatedly the suspicion that she was some sort of spy, to which Holmes laid out a counter argument so complete that Gregson was begging him to stop by its completion. We were granted the care of Miss Jhe for the short term, for Holmes to continue his investigation. But this required one stop first before we would tend to the actual location of interest.

Holmes gave Sang Mi his cloak, and as we got to the carriage paid a boy to take a message to a Modiste whom Holmes had heard good things about and tell her to arrive at 221B Baker Street posthaste, with some dresses and fabric that could be resized quickly.

"What's a Modiste?" Sang Mi asked as we got moving.

"A dressmaker. Your own clothing will draw too much attention as we reach the final stage of our work. Until we can solve this mystery, you'll need to blend in as well as you can."

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She nodded but scrunched her nose up, "Well, hopefully it's not too uncomfortable."

We arrived, and Holmes launched into an explanation to Mrs. Hudson of why we had a teenage girl with us, that she was a client, and that he would cover the costs of her staying with her for the time being, since it would be improper otherwise, and Mrs. Hudson was far gentler and more sympathetic to Holmes' request than I expected, perhaps out of concern for the girl or in combination with a joy at seeing Holmes take such consideration himself.

We took Sang Mi up to our apartment, where she spent quite a bit of time examining things, and excitedly telling us about our own cases, until the Modiste arrived.

Ms. Stella Marsdon was quite the image of the independent working woman. A long deep green skirt was complimented by a blouse and tie with a men's suit jacket, and her tightly wound hair was complimented by the monocle that she had squeezed over one eye.

"I see this is my client?"

Sang Mi waved with a nervous casualness.

Ms. Marsdon looked to Holmes, "What exactly is she wearing?"

"Normal clothes from her home country, we need something quickly for travel around town."

She nodded, and promptly kicked us out of our own home so she could work in private. We took a stroll through the crisp air to a nearby cafe till the same boy who we'd sent to Ms. Marsdon earlier came by to tell us the work was done.

Holmes clearly had excellent contacts, as the work of the Modiste was, to match her name, stellar. Sang Mi had been fully done up, in blue day dress with white trimming, as well as a hat and boots. She held her arms out and moved them around awkwardly as if testing they still worked.

"I'm surprised how mobile it is, though it's not very loose."

"It's not supposed to be," Ms. Marsdon replied. "However, you should be able to go about town much more inconspicuously."

"There are so many layers..." Sang Mi mumbled.

"You've done well Ms. Marsdon, your reputation is well earned. I'll order six more outfits for her, to be delivered here upon completion, now then, if you are ready Miss Sang Mi, the game is afoot, and the three of us must meet it head on."

Now that she no longer stood out like an orange cat, Sang Mi was able to slowly guide us to where this house was. It took some looking around, and questioning as to landmarks she could remember we could locate.

"I believe it's over here--yes! I recognise that lamppost," Sang Mi hurried along, tripping over her skirts occasionally, before remembering to lift them, a thing she said she'd known only from stories of our time. I began, slowly, to believe her.

But when we turned that fateful corner, I dropped all sympathy and care. Indeed, the expression of my visage must have been quite terrible, because Sang Mi took two steps back, hunching her head down like a pet fearing a scolding.

"...I have played along with this game, Sherlock, but this is too far, and I will play my part no longer."

Sang Mi looked between myself and the house, confused, an anxiety growing within her. Before us stood my house. My old house, a house I had shared so many memories in with my dear Mary. It loomed over us, taunting me. You couldn't see through the shuttered and boarded windows, but I knew what was behind each one. The empty nursery that was never filled. The cold bedroom that had once been full of warmth and comfort. The dining room we had shared so many smiles in. I could hear the house laughing at me, though all was silent. The echo of loss pounded in my ears.

Holmes had stopped still, and removed his hat, looking at me with the deepest sympathy. "I'm sorry my dear friend. I had suspected--"

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"Had you suspected? Or had you known? Did you set this up, was this some cruel prank or jest? Not that I've known you to do such a thing--perhaps an experiment on the criminal mind?"

He shook his head gently. "Nothing of the sort. I think you're right, this is a cruel game. But it is not mine."

"Then it's hers, is it?"

Sang Mi cowered at my anger, placing the lamppost between herself and me, one eye peeking out from behind it. The fear in it brought me to my senses, and shame to my heart.

"...I apologise. I... spoke rashly in anger. This was my house, you see."

I rambled on for a time, I will not give you all the details, but I know I spoke for long enough that by the time my throat had become dry, she had come out from behind the lamppost.

"It's alright, I really didn't know. I get it. I've lashed out when I've lost people too, its only human to fill the empty spot in your heart with whatever you can find, even if its more pain."

"The lady is too kind," I took in a deep breath, and steadied myself. "We should head inside, and find out why someone has done such a thing."

Holmes replaced his hat, and nodded. "I am sure if someone is here, they know we are about to open that door. I have other eyes here, and they have yet to alert me that anyone has left. So if they are here, now would be the time to ready your service revolver."

I had brought it for just such a scenario. We crept cautiously to the door, and Holmes turned the knob. It was not locked, though the inside was dark and difficult to peer into. I was about to call for a lantern, when Miss Jhe pulled her mirror out, and brought forth the light she had claimed it could make earlier. It was brighter than I could imagine, cutting through the darkness and carving its way down the entryway to the back wall, where a man was standing with his back pressed to it, arm raised to shield his eyes.

"Don't move, name yourself," I called.

We couldn't see his eyes, but we could see his teeth bared into a wide grin. "Call me Lazarus, perhaps."

"It's him," Holmes whispered. "Moriarty."

"One and the same. You took longer outside than I anticipated. I see there is still something lingering in this empty house. This world... it's something else. I had almost not believed it, that there could be a place where I could meet you again after Reichenbach.."

"You speak as though you are Moriarty, and yet not the Moriarty I know."

"Did you not already suspect? Ah, I see, you had met a girl from the future, I see your reasoning now. But there is so much more to learn. Though you may not believe this Mr. Holmes, I am so relieved to see you, things got so... boring at the top."

I gritted my teeth, "And you ignore the... disgrace of using this house for your parlour tricks?"

"Doctor Watson, I am here precisely because I can help you. Miss Jhe there was an accident, a... missed target. I can make this house filled with light and warmth again. You have only to ask, turn that revolver around, and give me Sang Mi, and I can reunite you--in the same way I have defied death."

Sang Mi looked up at me, there was a firmness to her eyes I didn't expect. "It's a trick."

"It's no trick," Moriarty countered simply.

"Even in my time, the dead can't return."

"And yet, here I am."

I took in a breath, and let it out slowly. I felt the air leave me, and levelled the pistol at him. "Even if I have lost the warmth in my heart, I am not so cold as to turn on my comrades."

Moriarty's surprise emanated from his voice. "Well then, I suppose I will have to resort to parlour tricks. You will see me yet again--the game has only played its first hand!"

There was a snap, and a bang of sound and light, and as we coughed and the smoke cleared, he was gone. With trepidation, we moved through the house, but there was nothing to find. Only my own solemn memories.

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We returned to 221B Baker Street, and had a fine dinner prepared by Mrs. Hudson. Sang Mi told us of the world she came from--according to her it had once been called Mars, before it had been settled. She lived in a great glass dome, like an overturned fishbowl, which kept the air in. The entire thing would have felt ludicrous, had I not had the experiences of the last 24 hours.

"But some things don't change," she said. "I lost my grandmother not that long ago, and I lashed out at my friends and family. I found myself again with those people."

I looked over to Holmes. "Well, perhaps I have done the same without intending to."

She smiled at that, and the rest of the meal was a joyful one.

After spending the night in Mrs. Hudson's lodgings, Sang Mi awoke and joined us for breakfast, at which time we were joined by another unexpected guest. Reading the newspaper as she sat next to him eating toast, was Sherlock's brother, Mycroft.

"Well sit down, don't let me stop you from enjoying your meal."

I did so, and looked between him, Holmes, and the girl.

"Mycroft has been regaling us about a problem which it turns out we are already acquainted with," Sherlock explained. "It appears that these sort of... portals to other times and places are not isolated incidents."

I was perhaps more shocked than I should have been.

Sang Mi nodded at his explanation. "Mycroft says they'll be putting me up in a townhouse with anyone else they find till they can figure out how to get us home. I'll get a government stipend, so that's cool."

I took a bite of my own toast, and as I chewed it, chewed over this information as well. "I take it then that we will be continuing this case?"

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Holmes smiles, "Of course my dear doctor, we'll be beginning immediately. And I'm sure this will be one unlike any other."

I wasn't sure if I was prepared for this, but I knew that it would be necessary. Sang Mi was a resilient young lady, but not everyone or every problem would be solved with such ease and willingness to assist. So I ate heartily, as I prepared myself for the next chapter of what would prove to be the strangest and most bizarre of all the cases that my friend Sherlock Holmes and I would ever undertake.

We could only do our best, and hope for our foes' hands to slip.

## 2. The Adventure of the Piscine Pranksters

The degree to which even a man of science — a man who feels himself to be of soundly and unwaveringly rational mind — can find himself accepting in stride even the most unthinkable happenings is, I have often found, truly astonishing. The realisation to which I, alongside my dear friend Sherlock Holmes, had recently come — that our beloved London was beset by a plague of tears in the very fabric of reality itself, and that other worlds and higher planes existed beyond our own — had resolutely *not* sent me into the kind of fearful hysterics which I might have imagined such a revelation would. In fact, having quite quickly yielded to the weight of evidence to the effect that this was, in fact, the current state of affairs, I had set my mind *not* to questioning all that I knew about existence — but, instead, to the immediate and, dare I say, *logical* issue of what was causing this scourge and how it might be remedied.

I am sorry to report that the entire affair had nonetheless been causing me a great deal of strain and a great deal of anxiety, of late. For it was a dreadful thing to be afflicted with the thought that, at any moment, some new and unthinkable entity might come 'round the corner — that Professor Moriarty, whom we had previously believed deceased, was somehow involved in these events and would doubtless try to catch us in a trap — and that the burden of solving it lay entirely upon Holmes and I, despite the fact that it seemed to be an impossible puzzle.

I say that I set my mind to these things, but in truth I was rather secondary to such proceedings. It was, of course, Sherlock Holmes who had taken up the bulk of this intellectual weight, an endeavour to which I was more than happy to leave



him. Even now, as we strolled through the streets of our city, he was deep in thought — pondering, of course, but also — I am quite sure — taking note of all that surrounded him. When faced with such an unusual issue as this — Holmes had assured me — anything and everything around us should be viewed with an eye towards it possibly being key to solving the entire riddle.

Our path through the city had been a long and tortuous one, following no apparent course — although I was certain that Holmes *did* have one in mind, despite appearances. It had started to rain, somewhere past the church, and a heavy wind had joined it not a minute later, so that we were now inundated with a fine mist of precipitation, whipping up against our overcoats from every angle. The sky was grey, and threatening worse — and, though I should not have liked to cavort through a thunderstorm, I held my tongue.

In fact, I had endured the entire walk from our flat in silence, allowing Holmes his quiet meditations — and it was only as we turned into a barren alley-way where I had never before tread that I at last risked turning to my faithful friend.

"Holmes," I asked him, cautiously, "Forgive me, but why — ?"

"We are here, Watson," he began, having already deduced my query despite my hesitant speech, "because *this*, if I am not very much mistaken, is the location in which the next tear will be opening."

He quirked an eyebrow in his cryptic manner.

"And I am *not* mistaken."

Having known Holmes as many years as I have, I did not doubt him for a second — but my curiosity was piqued to no small degree. I told Holmes as much, and asked him how he could know this with such confidence — as he had not, previously, told me of any formula he had devised by which to pinpoint the openings of these tears.

"I have found no such method." Holmes told me, stepping forward down the alley. "It is from simple observation that I have drawn my conclusion. Did you not

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notice, Watson, a certain... *unusual feeling*, before, while in the vicinity of the previous such rifts which we have encountered?"

"Why, yes, I did!", I told him — for I had, although I had not consciously taken note of it before. "I should say it was — something like the feeling of an open window in a small flat, as applied to all of the world around us!"

"To reality itself, Watson." Holmes confirmed. "And I have been tracking that feeling, in fits and in starts, throughout London. *This* is where it is the strongest."

It *was*, I realised. Holmes had done it again — and now, having made his proclamation, he stopped at the end of the alley-way.

"It will open *here*." he proclaimed after a moment of deep thought, indicating an unassuming spot. "And I suggest, Watson, that we prepare ourselves for any eventuality."

No sooner had he spoken than the area to which he had pointed began to glow and swirl. Thinking back on it now, it resembled nothing so much as a great whirling maelstrom — of the kind that old sailors will spin sea-tales about at any opportunity they are given. At the time, of course, I was far too surprised at the suddenness with which it had developed to think of any such things at all — only to stare, shocked. It widened, becoming the spitting image of the rifts which we had seen before — and then, as Holmes grasped me by the sleeve and pulled me to the side of the alley-way with haste, a vast form began to emerge from the tear.

It was a great sailing-ship — a galleon of the high seas, with billowing sails to match. It floated forth from the rift, seeming to bob on thin air rather than water — then lowered itself onto the cobblestones beneath us, filling much of the alley and leaving only a small gap in which Holmes and I could stand. There was a great crack along the hull of it — though I noted that it had been sealed with care and what looked to be adhesive bandages — and its sails scraped the walls of the buildings on either side of us. Glancing upwards, I could make out a small orange flag waving atop the mast. In the shock of the moment, I felt sure that it could not *possibly* — despite

appearances — be a drawing of a fish. It was only later that I realised how very wrong I had been.

Before Holmes or I could speak a word, a rope-ladder descended from the deck of the ship, and a person descended with motions like that of a pantomime pirate. It was only their *motions*, I must take care to point out, which in any way resembled a seafaring swashbuckler — for the person was dressed, head-to-toe, in a costume which resembled, once again, a very large fish.

"Say, there!" Holmes hailed them, stepping forward into the small space available to us. "Do not be alarmed. My friend Watson and I have some experience with tears much like that which you have emerged from, and have now dealt with all manner of entities which have come from the other side of them. If you will simply tell us who you are and where you have come from, we are sure that we can assist you in — "

The figure leapt from the ladder. Executing a clumsy spin in mid-air and landing on its flipper-covered feet before us, it bowed in the manner of the theatre — then announced, a laugh nearly breaking through with every word:

"I am Bos'n Claptrap of the Faction of the Fooling Fish!"

I do not know what Holmes would have replied to this pronouncement — certainly I haven't a clue which question *I* would first have asked, of the many which were by that point circulating in my mind — because the apparent boatswain clapped her hands, and three more figures in similar dress leapt from the deck of the ship, landing in a manner which was in no way agile, but which seemed *intentionally* so — an awkward pantomime for the purpose of our amusement.

"We've finally made it!" called one of the Fish. "The 10,000 Dawns! In all of our multiversal travellings, we've *never* been to the 10,000 Dawns!"

"Have we landed anywhere cool?" one of the others put in, casting its eyes about the alley. It spotted Holmes and I, and its face seemed to fall. "Aw, no, it's just a Holmes and a Watson."

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"Bah!" said the third. "You can find Holmes and Watson in *any* old universe! Heck, there's even a Holmes and a Watson back in our *original* home! If we're in the 10,000 Dawns, we ought to find something *unique!*"

"Now, now!" Claptrap rebuked them. "We can't neglect to spread our wonderful gift to such a gloomy old city as this just because it's *boring!* That's all the more reason to give 'em a *great* April Fools' Day!"

I was relieved, then, to see that Holmes had once again stepped forward, ready to speak — for I was unsure how much longer I could stand to listen to the private conversation of the Fooling Fish.

"Here, now!" Holmes exclaimed. "While we are, as I have said, happy to help the lot of you — I must ask you to explain yourselves in a bit more depth! How was it that you came to find yourselves falling through this tear? And in what sense *do* you mean it when you say that you intend to give a *gift* to London?"

"Yes!" I put in, "I wondered that myself! Are you charity-workers, on some higher plane?"

"I should think it more likely, Watson," Holmes muttered to me, "That they would be a troupe of players — should their intentions truly be pure. But note the mischief in their eyes... no, I have reason to suspect that we will find their motives entirely unpalatable."

"We Fooling Fish are trying to reinvigorate ourselves!" Claptrap replied. "See, we used to travel by rift, before we came across our beautiful *Fish'N'Ship!* So we decided to get back to our roots and figure out what it was that *inspired* us in the first place! Problem is, where we come from, there *aren't* any rifts any more — so we used our Time Scrambler to get back to an era when the crisis was in full swing, and sailed through the first one we saw!"

One of the other Fish nodded.

"And, gosh, it was hard to get in! These guys we know, they *really* hate rifts, and *they* were heading towards it to try to

figure out what was causing it! But don't worry, we knocked their ship right out of the way!"

"I rather think," said Holmes, dryly, "That I would have greatly preferred the company of the people to whom you refer. But in all of your ramblings, you have yet to answer my most pressing question. Just *what* do you intend to do here?"

"The best thing we know, Mr Holmes!" Claptrap exclaimed. "We're going to prank you and everyone in London! Happy April Fools!"

And with that, an entire crew of people in similar disguise emerged from hatches all across the ship. Barrelling past us, and holding large crates of strange supplies — among which I could make out what looked to be the exaggerated form of a chicken made from rubber, and a worrying quantity of pies — they made their way into the city, shrieking with laughter.

"I think, Watson," said Holmes, with a slight frown. "That we may have something of a problem on our hands."

I could only nod, realising suddenly that the Fish had reminded me of nothing so much as a particularly ill-behaved group of schoolchildren, and wondering with no small amount of anxiety at what sort of terrors such a group might exact upon our beloved city when armed with masses of supplies and a flying ship at their disposal.

\* \* \*

For several days, Holmes and I saw neither fin nor scale of the Fish — and it was my folly, at the time, to believe that we were genuinely rid of them, that they had perhaps departed without our notice, off to other pastures. In that time, we continued to work on the enigma of the tears and the mystery of the deceased Moriarty's involvement — although we had yet to make any real progress when our investigations were interrupted by a telegram, directed to Holmes and imploring him to track down a man who had apparently been missing for many days. Putting our research on hold, we set off on his trail.

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Holmes, in usual good form, used the meagre information with which the telegram had provided us to unearth enough clues as to trail our missing man — a one Scherzo Archimboldo, whom I supposed to be of Italian descent — throughout the entire city. A hotel booking here, a sighting in a newspaper photograph there — we blazed through London as did the great fire, everything falling into place before us. Eventually, we found ourselves in an abandoned mill — the location at which, Holmes had determined, our man had last been sighted.

We stepped into the darkened building, and I felt a terrible chill all down my spine. I hated to confess it to Holmes, for fear that he would think me illogical, but the place had the feel of a ghost-story about it, and I had never been brave in the face of such things. Yet I pressed on, out of obligation and — partly, I admit — out of a desire to prove that I was beyond such petty fears. Oh, would that it were true!

Holmes, of course, seemed totally unbothered. He bade me to follow him, and I did, creeping slowly through the dust and spider-webs which blanketed the entire building. We searched the place for many minutes, until we came upon a prone form in the darkness.

My heart was in my throat, and I am ashamed to confess that I lingered back several feet, allowing Holmes to step forward and bend down before what looked for all the world to be a body. He felt at the wrist, then stood, shaking his head.

"There is no pulse," he told me sadly, "I shall have to call for an examiner."

We turned to leave — which inspired in me much relief, for all that the plight of the poor man distressed me. But this was not to last — for from behind us issued an eerie wail. Nearly fainting outright at the shock, I steadied myself — then turned, very slowly, to see that what Holmes had just pronounced as a dead man was beginning to rise, unsteadily, to its feet.

It resembled, in its motions, nothing so much as a marionette, swaying and wobbling as it began to walk towards

us — but perhaps I am letting my later experiences colour my description. Certainly, at the time, I could think of nothing but to turn and run — although I was foiled in this attempt by the fact that my legs had become quite frozen with fear, and would heed no commands from my higher consciousness. The weird figure beckoned to me, jerking forward with a saccadic shudder and claspings — it seemed then — for my throat.

"*Watson!*", it shouted, in a high and nasal voice, "*Hey, Watson! Woooo! Booo! I'm gonna getcha!*"

"Holmes!" I managed to gasp, feeling greater terror at this horrifying declaration of the corpse's intent than ever before in my life — but Holmes was no longer beside me. With a force of will, I turned my head towards the far wall — just in time to see Sherlock Holmes light, with the use of his matchbook, a previously-unnoticed lamp situated upon the wall. The sparse room was soon bathed in a flickering golden glow, revealing the full features of the zombie which had nearly made an end of me.

"That," said Holmes, "is a puppet."

Indeed! I looked again and saw that there was no dead man — only an oversized puppet hanging from a set of strings which stretched to the rafters. It was made all of felt — had a ridiculous, gaping mouth and goggling eyes, one of which popped out of its seam and bounced several times across the floor, coming to a rest at my foot. From above came the shrieking peals of laughter.

"April Fools!" called one of the Fooling Fish, peering from the rafters. "We sure got ya good *that* time, didn't we?"

Before either of us could respond — and I suppose there is some good in that, for I could scarcely have printed my response here, and I should hate to leave this memorandum incomplete — the Fish darted off through some secret passage, vanishing from sight. I cast my eyes towards Holmes. Outwardly, he had retained his usual stoic demeanour — but I could see that his jaw was clenched. Never, I think, had he been so deceived, and certainly never in a manner which I might describe, if I am honest, as a totally farcical one — much as I

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hesitate to do so, as such an adjective indicates myself, more than any other, as the proverbial April Fool.

I should like to write, now, some sentence to the effect that this was our final encounter with the Fooling Fish. But I have always prided myself an honest man — if not, regrettably, always a very brave one.

\* \* \*

In spite of this distasteful incident, it was not long before the Fish were once again pushed from the forefront of our minds. The days which followed were busy ones, full of inquiries and investigations — encounters with the rifts and visits to our recent, displaced friends at Mycroft's townhouse. Half a week had passed before Holmes next received a request for assistance which did *not* concern the tears in our reality — but such a request *did* eventually arrive, from a wealthy man who feared that robbers had found some secret entrance into his vault and were, by degrees, making off with its precious contents. He had apparently been unable to *locate* any such hidden passage, but — as he was certain that it *was* occurring — his letter implored Holmes to search the vault and find the exact means by which the crime was being committed.

We arrived at the indicated area, a local bank which seemed — I will admit — less prestigious than I would have imagined a truly wealthy man's depository of choice. It was obvious that Holmes thought the very same, for he turned to me and said:

"We must be on our guard, Watson, for anything."

I nodded, then turned to see that the man who had summoned us was approaching. He was a tall and burly figure, his features rough and somewhat feline. He shook my hand with powerful enthusiasm, nearly lifting me off of my feet, then reached for Holmes — who stepped gingerly to the side and asked the man to lead us as quickly as possible to the vault in question.



"Why, *sure*, pals!" he heartily replied — although there was a definite, wily undertone to his words, as if he were privately chuckling at some deception. He turned, walking towards the bank with long strides. "Just follow me!"

His voice, slyness aside, was gravelly and American. Surely, I realised, he must have made his fortune in the West, handily explaining his unusual traits — or so I had *thought*, at the time. We followed him, Holmes and I, into the bank and off to a vault somewhere near the back.

"This is th' place!" the man informed us, indicating the door. "And *here's* the combination."

He handed us a slip of paper. Holmes examined it, then gave a curt nod and stepped forward, rotating the spindle wheel to the appropriate positions. After a moment, the lock gave a click — and Holmes (still, I noted, with something of a wary look in his eye) tugged the door fully open.

Never before and never since have I seen such a deluge. It was an avalanche so great as to put the fiercest floods of the Thames to shame, a torrent of unimaginable proportions — and ever since that moment I have privately thought of the events of my life, up to that point, as having been antediluvian. The objects with which we were suddenly beset tumbled from the depths of the vault, and the squeaking of each individual component ran together until the sound of it was as if the crust of the world itself was splitting beneath us. Holmes and I were bowled over entirely as the contents of the vault rolled over us, finally coming to a gradual stop. I sat up, blinking, and found myself lying within a great pile of what must have been many thousands of rubber ducks.

From behind us came the boisterous laughter of the man who had sought our assistance.

"Aw haw haw!" he bellowed, doubling over. "You shoulda seen your faces!"

Reaching up, he pulled a mask down over his head — the mask of a Fooling Fish! From within the vault, Claptrap bounded over the ducks, giving the burly man an enthusiastic pat on the back.

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"That was a *great* one, Captain!"

"Aw, well, I do try my best." the man answered with mock humility, wiping a tear of mirth from his eye. "And, hey, we weren't really lyin' to you, neither! We *did* find a secret entrance, on account o' the bank wouldn't let us *deposit* these things! Now that ya know about it, maybe it'll save ya some trouble later, once we've left. *That* sort of kindly gesture is what we call the Fooling Fish Difference!"

Before Holmes or I could fully extract ourselves from the mound of bathtime toys, the two Fish had scampered off with admirable litheness, laughing all the way. "Toodle-oo!", I think I heard the burly man call to us over his shoulder.

I turned to Holmes, and noted that he was staring after them, a distant look in his eyes.

"Watson," he said to me, "I am at last beginning to understand the fury of an angler who has long chased a cunning fish, and long been frustrated in his attempts."

"Yes," I replied, scarcely believing what had just occurred. "I feel rather like Ahab himself."

\* \* \*

It had been only a day since the incident at the bank when Holmes next received a request for his assistance. A note had been delivered to the local constabulary, scrawled in green ink in the disorganised handwriting of a criminal acting in haste, which purported to be a ransom letter.

*'We have in our possession the child of a local baker', it read, 'Which shall be returned to you with great haste, provided you meet us at the following location with the following sum.'*

Attached was an address, as well an amount of money which was not, in truth, particularly hefty — although I suppose that it would be improper of me to record the precise amount, not least for fear that providing too many details of this particular case will lead only to the further embarrassment of all involved — a quantity which, at this point, needs no compounding.

Holmes' presence having been requested at the scene, we set out that very evening. A suspicion nagged at me as we neared, and I could not help but to ask:

"Holmes, does it not occur to you that this may yet be another trick of those duplicitous, scheming pranksters who call themselves the Fooling Fish?"

"It does, Watson," he answered me, "But I cannot allow such suspicions — likely as they may seem — to interfere with my duties."

So on we went. Eventually, we came to the indicated spot — a lonesome tree at the edge of a nearby park. Lestrade and some others were already on the scene, and together, we waited for the perpetrator to emerge.

Despite my earlier hesitations, I soon found the worrisome thrill of the thing overwhelming me, pushing thoughts of the Fish from my mind once again. It seemed that no time at all had passed — and I will admit that I spent that small amount of time with my heart fairly pounding, wondering what sort of scene might shortly develop — before a shadowy silhouette stepped out from a distant bush.

We watched as it reached back into the foliage and drew out what looked to be a burlap sack — which was most certainly full of *something* very heavy. I knew that it could only be the baker's child — and I only hoped that the poor youngster was alright.

One of Lestrade's men stepped forward with the money, while the others stayed back behind the tree. Holmes stood at the ready to ensure that, in the event of the blighted villain's escape, all possible clues towards their identity would be recorded in his perceptive mind.

With a small distance still separating them, Lestrade's man displayed the money. The silhouetted figure reached into the bag — and Holmes suddenly stepped forward.

"Hold a moment!" he commanded, standing in front of the man — but the silhouetted figure did not pause. Removing a circular object from the bag, it lobbed the projectile into

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Holmes's face. I gasped as the great flying blueberry pie made impact, dousing my friend with pastry and fruit.

"*Hee hee hee!*" came the voice of a Fooling Fish — the silhouette, now revealed. It was obviously having trouble getting its words across, so uncontrollable was its laughter. "Get it? Get it? The child of a baker? Hee hee! And we returned it to you with great haste, just like we said! Ha *ha!*"

The Fish scampered back into the bushes, and I could only stare after it in shock — although I worried, for a moment, that I would be forced to restrain the ordinarily unflappable Holmes from rushing after the prankster in a rage.

\* \* \*

After that, I was afforded little rest. The possibility of the Fooling Fish putting in yet another appearance weighed on my mind, to be sure, but it was the increased rate at which the rifts were appearing and at which Holmes and I were forced to deal with the myriad entities which came through them — as well as the terrifying knowledge that Moriarty was somehow involved, and would in all likelihood be planning some especially fiendish trap for us one day soon — that truly strained me. If I had been anxious before, I was certainly so now. I could scarcely sleep, could scarcely go about my day without being forced to deal with these occurrences — so that I was beginning to feel entirely stretched to my limit, and liable to break at a moment's notice. I wandered the streets of London with tired eyes and an aching head, always wondering from which direction the next inconvenience would be coming.

I could see that Holmes, in the time between cases, was beginning to plan something — that tell-tale look was in his eyes, and I knew that it would not be long before it came to light. At the time, I regret to say that my only hope was that I would not have to be very much involved in it. But I waited, until Holmes finally declared to me one morning:

"Watson, I am going to meet with the Fooling Fish."

At this proclamation, I could scarcely contain my shock. In fact, I do not believe that I did. To Holmes, I replied:

"But what can you hope to achieve? They are not *reasonable* people, by any means! And, if they are not inconveniencing us just *now* — then surely there are more pressing things to attend to, and we may put the Fish, for the moment, out of mind!"

"No, Watson," Holmes replied, shaking his head, "It is best to deal with these matters as they come, rather than allowing them to stack up for later. For too long we have allowed the Fish to play their tricks upon us at any time — and I should like to remove that possibility from among the many obstacles which we already face in solving this most baffling mystery. They are not reasonable, but they are by no means inhuman, and I am sure I can find some way to convince them of the necessity of their speedy departure — or, at least, of the cessation of their practical jokes."

Holmes would hear no more talk to the contrary. That afternoon, after a light lunch — consisting, I am somewhat amused to report, of fish and sliced potatoes prepared by our landlady, Mrs Hudson — he set off to parts unknown, seeking the Fooling Fish.

He returned to the flat late that evening, and would not — despite my prying — divulge many details of the day's events. He would only tell me that he had sorted *something* out which would surely allow us to take the Fish off of our now-lengthy list of concerns. There was a strange look in his eyes, I thought, which worried me — for I felt certain that he was now planning something entirely new and entirely unusual. Still, as there seemed to be nothing else for me to do just at *that* time, I looked forward to a night of rest. This, I am sorry to say, I did not attain — for, with all of the stress of recent events still weighing on me, I could scarcely manage to catch a wink.

Morning came — as it will do at these times — altogether too early, and I, tired and irritable, watched Holmes with concern. He moved shiftily about the flat, eyes cryptic, seeming to be deep in thought and muttering occasionally to

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himself. Eventually, I could stand it no longer. I demanded that he tell me what it was that he was scheming — and he, after considering me for a moment, reached into his coat-pocket and produced a small wooden box.

"I have determined," he said at last, "That only the item contained herein could possibly convince the Fish to leave our poor city alone. Do not ask me where I located it, Watson, trust only that I have!"

He pressed the box into my hands, although I was quite reluctant to take it.

"But, Holmes!" I said, "What *is* it? Are we to use it as blackmail, or — ?"

"You will find out, Watson, you will find out!" he answered me. "And you will do so this very day. I have found what I believe to be a lead in our ongoing mystery of the rifts, and I shall be indisposed with it until tonight. You must find the current docking-place of that boat which they call the *Fish'N'Ship*, and only then must you open this box. Can I count on you, my loyal friend?"

At this speech, I was entirely shocked, and hadn't the slightest idea how to respond. I was to confront the Fish, alone, with an item the nature of which I was not yet allowed to know — while Holmes went off chasing a lead on the case we had been trying to crack without giving me any hint as to what this lead might be? It was almost too much!

"But — !" I protested, sputtering. "But, Holmes, you mustn't — !"

"No further arguments, Watson! We must make great haste!" he told me — then very nearly pushed me out of the flat, so enthusiastic was his rush. Baffled, and unsure how to proceed, I felt that I *could* do nothing but set off in search of the flying ship — for I was feeling altogether too tired and too stressed to protest it any further. And so I set off, looking for any sign of the mast with the orange flag upon it.

The journey was long and tiresome, and I began to gripe and to grumble. This was all far too much at once, I felt, and I was beginning to feel like a candle that had well and truly come

to the end of its wick. I needed a holiday, I was sure, or at least a rest — but I did not seem likely to get one, not now. The crisis of the tears pressed on.

Eventually, I crested a hill in the nearby park — and there, among the distant grass, sat the *Fish'N'Ship*. I could see the Fooling Fish frolicking beside it — and I quickened my pace, till I was within sight of them. I feared that they would bombard me, at once, with pies or with rubber ducks — but they simply waved from afar. Taking a steadying breath, I placed the box which I was carrying upon the ground, then knelt low.

As I made ready to open the box, the anxieties of my mind reached a fever-pitch. Supposing I was going about it the wrong way? Supposing the Fish, contrary to Holmes's assurance, refused to leave? Supposing they never left? Supposing the tears plagued our city for the rest of time, and the spectre of Moriarty's return remained forever lurking around every corner? These thoughts and many more raced through my mind, which wound itself so tight that, had it been a clockwork machine, its cogs would surely have burst. My heart thumping, my nerves racing, I lifted the box's lid.

And vast quantities of confetti rocketed forth, accompanied by a sound something like the bellow of a railway whistle.

Perhaps I ought to have been angry at this turn of events. Perhaps I ought to have cursed the Fooling Fish with renewed passion. But — in that instant, to have my anxieties offset by such an absurdity felt as if a great weight had been lifted off of my shoulders. What had, seconds before, seemed so all-important as to allow the world to hang in its balance was suddenly revealed for the silly trifle which I suppose it ultimately was, and I — *laughed*. Long and hard, until there were tears of mirth in my own eyes.

Eventually, I rose to my feet — wondering, suddenly, what role Holmes had played in these events. I did not have to worry for long — for he stepped out from behind the nearest tree, and laid a reassuring hand upon my shoulder.

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"Holmes!" I said, shocked. "Did you know — ?"

"I *am* sorry, Watson, for participating in this little joke," he told me, "And I do hope that it was received in only the best of ways. When I set out, yesterday, to confront the Fooling Fish, it was in earnest. And we talked, as I promised that we would. I inquired of them what it was that they hoped, ultimately, their pranking should achieve. There was much debate among them, much discussion — but eventually, they all came to one conclusion. They told me that, when all was said and done, the point of their jokes *wasn't* to make their targets angry, for all that such a reaction is often the result — on the contrary, that it was to give them a moment of *joy*. They further informed me that they *would* shortly be leaving our city and our world — but only if I would agree to help them with a final joke. And, since I had noticed the pressure which all of this crisis had been putting *you* under, Watson..."

He coughed — somewhat sheepishly, I should think.

"Well. I thought it couldn't hurt to give their way a try. Just once."

I could not find it in myself to feel angry at Holmes, or at the Fish. Indeed, I felt refreshed — ready to dive back into our investigations. Assuring him that I had taken his little joke as intended — I nonetheless informed him that I should *not* like to find myself subject to any further ones.

"Don't worry!" chimed Claptrap, from behind us. "We really *are* leaving now! Like we said, we came here to get back to our roots and reinvigorate our love for pranking. And our chat with your pal there helped us out a lot!"

"Yeah," added the burly man who had deceived us before, casting his eyes downward and rubbing at the back of his neck, "We'd lost sight o' the real *point* o' prankin'. The *fun* part, an' the 'spreading joy' part, too! We were too busy tryin' to pull bigger and bigger gags — but that ain't the *heart* of the thing, when you get down to it. Talkin' to Sherlock and prankin' *you* made us remember why we do it in th' first place!"

"But a friend of ours recently told us that you can't live in the past — even if it's fun to visit!" Claptrap finished, as the



Fish began to board their ship with awkwardly acrobatic flips and tumbles. "We're re-invigorated, refreshed — and now, we're heading back to our own present-day to think up brand *new* pranks and gags and goofs and everything else, with the heart back in 'em!"

Having made this speech, she grasped a rope-ladder, as the burly man clambered up another.

"First Officer Codswallop?" he called to someone on deck. "If you'd be so kind!"

The ladders were suddenly rolled up over the deck with the Fooling Fish still upon them, and Holmes and I watched and waved as the *Fish'N'Ship* floated off into the golden-afternoon sky, sailing back out of our reality on a cosmic fair-wind.

"Well, Watson," Holmes said at last, turning away, "Shall we get back to it, then? I'm beginning to feel a hint of that same old sensation again — another tear about to open, somewhere in London. Could very well require our attention, I should think."

"Yes, Holmes, *I* certainly would." I replied.

We set off into the city. As we strolled, Holmes drew his log-book out of the pocket of his coat, ready to jot down any interesting observations. Turning it to the most recent page, he halted in his tracks — then turned the book towards me. I peered at it — and saw that two of its sheets had been repurposed. A doodle of a fish stretched across them, with words along the top and bottom of it. "Happy April Fools' Day!", they read, in bold letters.

Even Sherlock Holmes couldn't help but chuckle.

### 3. Sherlock Versus Herlock

Perhaps, given the circumstances, I shouldn't have expected to get any respite from it all, but it had been a long day, and I was thoroughly exhausted, so I followed Sherlock back to our home as though I thought the universe owed us some rest. Of course, if the universe made such an offer, Sherlock would refuse it wholeheartedly. As we walked, I could tell his mind was elsewhere, piecing together theories and actions for how we should act going forward.

As we reached our home, Sherlock placed his arm in front of me to halt my movement. "Look, Watson," he said, gesturing towards the window.

I looked and saw two foreign silhouettes standing in our living room, along with the more recognisable form of Mrs. Hudson.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"I don't know... they're quite a peculiar set of intruders. One of them appears to be a typical, boring, upper middle-class city-goer." He turned to me, "Quite a bit like you, Watson." he added with a smirk before turning back to the window, "The other one though... quite queer dress for a Londoner."

I focused on the other silhouette and found myself agreeing with Holmes. The other figure seemed to be wearing an Inverness cape and a deerstalker cap more typical of someone from the desolate moors of Dorset than London.

"What do we do?" I asked.

Sherlock reached into his frock coat and pulled out a revolver, handing it to me, "They don't appear to be armed,

though we can't exclude that possibility entirely. Stay behind me. I'm going to open the door."

"But I already have a gun," I tried to say, but Sherlock was already at the door and I had no choice but to follow.

Sherlock brutishly shoved the door open, causing it to bang against the wall and prompting an annoyed "Oy, watch it!" from Mrs. Hudson. To avoid angering her further, I gently closed the door whilst Sherlock made his way to the living room where the intruders stood.

"Now, would you..." Sherlock began before stopping.

"Sherlock?" I asked, dashing to the living room.

We all stood for a moment, frozen by an immense confusion that had fallen upon everyone present. Now that we could see the intruders more clearly, the similarity Sherlock joked about between me became an exercise in irony. For a moment I thought Mrs. Hudson must've placed a looking glass in front of me, for we were identical! My lookalike seemed just as disturbed by the apparent similarity as I was.

The one wearing the deerstalker was also the subject of confusion because he seemed to look exceedingly similar to Sherlock, though the intruder also wore a bushy moustache that drooped down both sides of his mouth and flopped around as his lip trembled.

Eventually, my lookalike broke the silence. "I know it's perhaps not the most relevant thing to ask, but did you just refer to my companion as 'Sherlock?'"

"No," I answered out of politeness, "I referred to *my* companion as Sherlock."

"Well, I don't think my companion would think of you in the same terms as you think of him, given that you can't even say his name correctly. It's Herlock!"

I turned to Sherlock, "Do you know him?"

Sherlock turned to me, "I know his face, but not his claims." he then turned to my lookalike, "Why are you so sure that my name is Herlock?"

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The man in the deerstalker stepped forward, “You dullard, he’s referring to me! Now stop harassing Dr Wilson and get out of my house before I have Mrs. Higson phone the police.”

I was absolutely baffled “But we live here!”

Mrs. Hudson decided to leave the room. I wish I had followed her.

Sherlock stepped towards the man in the deerstalker, “You’re name’s Herlock?”

The man nodded, “Herlock Sholmes, don’t wear it out.”

Sherlock turned to my doppelganger, “And you’re... Dr Wilson?”

My doppelganger nodded.

“Interesting...” said Sherlock with high amusement in his voice.

Herlock seemed to be getting redder in the face, “I don’t know why you find our names so funny.”

Sherlock waved his hand, “Well, I must inform you that, despite whatever you believe you know about the world you live in, this isn’t your house. It is the home of I, Sherlock Holmes, and my dearest companion Dr. Watson, rented from our landlady Mrs. Hudson.”

Herlock turned to Wilson, “Could you deal with them, please? I don’t like this man, it’s like I’m talking to Lewis Carrol.”

Wilson nodded and pulled out a gun, prompting me to pull out mine. Seeing that we were at a standstill, I pulled out my own pistol, but, when I looked up, I saw that Wilson also had a second gun. “Bugger,” we uttered in simultaneous annoyance.

“Mrs. Higson, call the police!” Herlock yelled.

Sherlock tutted, “She’s Mrs. Hudson, and you don’t want that. I have the papers, I can prove that we are the owners and you are the intruder, and they’ll arrest you.”

Herlock got so close to Sherlock that their noses were nearly touching, “Is that your racket, ‘Sherlock’? Do you go around stealing houses by pretending to have similar names to their owners? Your fake name doesn’t even make sense. At

least Watson is a real name. ‘Sherlock Holmes’? You just switched the S around! Who in their right mind would name a child ‘Sherlock?’”

Sherlock sighed, “To answer your first question, no, we don’t have a racket, we just live here... now, if you’d like to stop yelling, there are some questions I’d like to ask you which could be mutually beneficial—”

“Sod off, I’m not working with an imposter.”

“Herlock,” said Wilson, timidly, “maybe this isn’t our house after all. I mean, think about it; your key didn’t work on the door, the housekeeper looks very different from Mrs. Higson, and you haven’t been able to find your double bass anywhere... and then there were all those other oddities you noticed whilst roaming the streets. Maybe walking through that door—”

“Nonsense,” Herlock grunted. “Though... if these imposters claim they have a legal advantage over us, then maybe it’s too dangerous to stay here.” he grabbed his assistant’s arm and began walking out, “Come on, Wilson, I’ll pay for a hotel. A real nice expensive one.”

Wilson tried to object, but his utterances remained incomplete as Herlock pulled him out of our house. I tried to chase them, but Sherlock stopped me.

“Watson,” he said, “normally I’d commend your efforts, but you need to rest.”

“But you said you had questions for them!”

“Yes, Watson, but it’s not like I can’t ask them tomorrow. Besides, given their beliefs, I don’t think they’ll go far from here. I’ll have the Irregulars keep an eye on them. Now, go sit down.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Hudson walked in with two cups of tea, “You’re the real ones this time, right? Sherlock and Watson?” we nodded, “Good. I’m not making any more tea tonight. I have a headache.”

“I hope you don’t mind me playing my violin, then,” said Sherlock.

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Mrs. Hudson groaned as she went out of the room, leaving us both alone to rest. I think I slept, though not for long. Sherlock probably stayed awake all night in an attempt to untangle this thick web of confusion. Part of me can't help but wonder if Herlock Sholmes and Wilson spent their night in a similar fashion.

#### 4. The Hole in Things

I write this in a haste. I fear if I do not get these words down onto paper, that they might fade from my memory as snow after a spring shower. Even now, I doubt my memory of the event. I fear that it may be simply a dream brought upon by stress and terror. I fear that I have gone mad. For what sane man could experience such a life as mine. These holes in the world, they should not be. They are filled with great terrors and wonders. Things beyond the scope of human imagination. Beyond the possible.

And yet, still, I am sane. I must remind myself time and time again that I am sane. For if I fail to do so, then... I might forget. I must remember. Despite everything that has happened, despite everything that I have seen, despite the things that I have participated in, been complicit in, been responsible for, I remain sane.

We never found the hole the man calling himself Moriarty walked out of. He was not the man, Holmes knew that to be true. The man calling himself Moriarty was not balding. He was not skeletal in face. He was not dressed in nice clothing or wearing a top hat. He did not even have the same eyes. Moriarty's eyes were black as soot. This man... his eyes were pale black. Like a corpse.

He was found inside an occult bookstore located on Cecil Court. Holmes had frequented the store many a time after his resurrection. I never saw the appeal in the store. Holmes would speak of keeping an open mind on the matter. There are more things in Heaven and Earth, as the Bard once said.

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We entered the store with the intent to purchase a text by the poet Blake. A third edition of his Proverbs. I had no interest in the work of Blake. He felt like an amateur scribbling his way into genius. Holmes never told me of his literary opinions, whether this was chosen out of a desire to read the poems or to unpick an implication of the world like a loose thread. He had done this before with the works of Shakespeare, which he was notorious in despising. The Bard of Avon was simply too simple for the great detective.

But when we entered the store, there was no one there. Not even the cashier. The lights were on. But the room was bare. Only dust was in the room. Piles and piles of dust just lying in the store. Perfectly scattered throughout. Only to be blown away by the autumnal wind. Holmes investigated the piles, tasted them and shuddered with horror. I asked him what had happened, but he remained silent. In his silence, I understood all too well what the piles were.

A noise was heard from downstairs. A wheezing, groaning sound like a dying lama. We descended down the spiral staircase to find a man. A man we knew didn't belong. Imagine, if you will, a child's drawing of the scene. Two men descending down a staircase to find a man with a knife standing before a mutilated body. The blade, still dripping with blood. The body, unrecognizable as human. Now imagine the man is a photograph in the world of a child's drawing.

He looked at Holmes and myself and said... and said... and said...

I've forgotten. I've forgotten everything. All the words spoken in that moment, now lost to the void. Phrases pop out without context of who or what said them.

"The game will end without your bees as salvation."

"Surely, Moriarty, the Devil is not so easily escaped."

"I am older than this flesh body implies. I will survive this encounter and recur time and time again. This is nothing more than an emanation."

"Good lord, his smile! His smile! HIS SMILE!"



“The inevitable collapse will only grow larger and larger, Mr. Holmes. You cannot escape the entropy. Things fall apart. We all fall down the hole in things”

The next thing I remember, the man calling himself Moriarty was gone. The body was gone. The piles of dust were gone. All that remained were two men lost in the dark. We did not speak as we returned to Baker Street. I simply returned to my room and wrote what I could remember.

I handed what I wrote before to Holmes, and he told me none of this happened. We never went to a bookstore for Proverbs by Blake. We never found piles of dust or a murderer calling himself Moriarty. He told me to burn what little I wrote out of disgust.

But I know this to be true! I know these things happened! I cannot remember them, but I know them to be true! They have to be true! They have to have happened! This is true! This is real! The bookstore is real! I returned and saw its occult contents. The man at the desk politely asked if Mister Holmes was to arrive shortly to pick up his books.

Sitting on the floor of the bookstore, reading a book far too old for her, was a girl with blue hair. She was no older than fifteen years old, dressed for the opera. She was dark in complexion. Her eyes were blue as sapphires. She was familiar, but I could not place where I saw her. For a moment, I considered approaching the girl, asking where we had met before. Instead, I stood there, watching as she left the store with the book in hand. But before she left, she muttered something I could only barely hear. Perhaps I was the only one who could hear those words.

“The crow wish'd every thing was black, the owl, that every thing was white. What do you wish, Dr. Watson?”

I must remind myself that I am sane.

## 5. The Adventure of the Stellar Sailing Ship

It was about two o'clock in the morning on the nineteenth of March, when I was awakened by the sound of Holmes playing his violin. Confused, I arose and knocked on the door of my friend's room: "Holmes, what in the world do you mean by this? It is not even light out!"

The door was flung open, and there was Holmes, wide-eyed as could be. He seemed stricken with some kind of madness. "It's these damnable cracks, Watson," he barked at me. "Truly, this is a case unlike anything you and I have ever faced before... even the hounds were easier to deal with than this. This is why I am playing my violin, I need to think."

"Has another of these rifts opened up, Holmes?" I asked. Already, Holmes and I had dealt with a number of beings from these cracks. They were much stranger clientele than our usual fare, to be sure.

As Holmes opened his mouth to reply, there came a scream: it was Mrs. Hudson, our landlady. "Mister Holmes! There's another one!" she cried.

Holmes didn't even stop to change, he simply hurried down the stairs in his night-clothes, and I followed along at his heels much like a dog runs after its master. And sure enough, there it was: a glowing white tear in the wall of the drawing room, directly across from the fireplace.

Holmes approached it cautiously, and I waited with bated breath. "This crack," he said eventually, "is not like any of the others... I can hear... I think they are engines, Watson."

"How peculiar... do you suppose it leads somewhere, Holmes?" I asked.

Holmes nodded. “Most certainly. There is but one way to be sure.” And against all better judgement, he walked closer towards the tear... and seemed to dissolve into mist.

“HOLMES!” I shouted, and ran after him... only to dissolve into mist myself. There was a blinding flash of light, and then...

We were simply someplace else. It seemed to be a large room, with barrels and crates stacked high all around, perhaps a cargo bay like those found aboard steamships. And we had changed... we no longer wore our nightclothes, but our preferred daytime outfits. Holmes and I wandered about for a while, exploring every corner we could find. The engine sound we had heard was louder now, echoing all around us.

“What do you think this place could be, Holmes?” I asked.

What Holmes said then was the most alarming thing I’d yet heard in my years of knowing him: “I haven’t the faintest idea, Watson...”

Next moment, a man entered through a pair of double doors on one side of the room. He wore a blue jacket of some type with black shoulders, and beneath that, a red shirt with black trousers... the outfit seemed very peculiar, and certainly did not look like anything Holmes or I had seen before.

“What the... who the hell are you two?!” he asked, seeming to be just as surprised at our appearance as we were of his.

“I am Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” he said. “And this is my companion, Doctor John H. Watson.”

The man in blue simply shook his head. “This can’t be... you’re fictional characters! You don’t exist in real life! Are you some kind of holographic projection?” He walked over to Holmes and made to tap him on the nose... and did so.

“Do you routinely violate the personal space of perfect strangers, sir?” Holmes asked, sounding *very* annoyed.

“Hey, I’m sorry, I’m just trying to figure out how a couple of detective novel characters from three-hundred years ago can be standing in one of our cargo bays,” said the man in blue. That we could be in a place three-hundred years from our time was startling, and yet in a moment I realised we had already

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met a girl from over four-hundred-fifty years onward. Would this look ancient to her?

The man raised his arm and tapped the watch he was wearing a few times, and then... there are simply no words to describe what happened next. A woman simply appeared, somewhat transparent, her image flickering. It was clear she was not actually in the room with us.

“MacPherson to Shadow: Captain, I’ve found the source of the anomaly in cargo bay three... I think you need to see this,” said this man, and the woman turned to face Holmes and I.

“I’m on my way, Lieutenant,” she said. “Shadow out.” And then her image disappeared.

Lieutenant MacPherson studied us both suspiciously, one hand resting on the holster for his weapon. “You caused this crack to appear, didn’t you?” he demanded.

“We most certainly did not, sir!” Holmes barked. “How dare you accuse us of such impropriety!”

MacPherson opened his mouth to speak again, but was interrupted as the doors through which he’d entered opened for a second time. In stepped a woman with light skin, almost as pale as Holmes’s. She had reddish-brown hair that she wore in a bun, and a nearly identical outfit to the lieutenant except that the undershirt was purple instead.

But the most striking thing about the woman was her eyes: bright, vivid emerald, perhaps the greenest eyes I’d ever seen in my life. She had a stern expression on her face, and looked between each of us in a fashion similar to Holmes whenever he was investigating something.

She took out some sort of rectangular box from a pocket of her jacket, and aimed it at us in turn. It made a humming noise, and she stared at it in shock. “Stars above...” she whispered. “You are reading as humans... then... you truly are Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John Watson?”

“I do not see why we could be anyone else, madam!” Holmes said testily. “What in the world is going on here?! I demand to know at once!”

“Believe me, Mr. Holmes, I am wondering the exact same thing,” the woman said. “But allow me to introduce myself... I am Captain Gemini Shadow, of the United Humanity Space Navy ship *Endeavour*. If you would please join me in my ready room, I believe we have much to discuss.”

She turned sharply on her heel and marched out, carrying herself in exactly the fashion as my own superior officers had in Afghanistan. Was she military as well? It seemed so. Holmes and I followed after her, wondering what other surprises might be in store.

\* \* \*

The good captain led us into a small chamber, not unlike that of a lift. She simply said “Bridge!” aloud, and then quite suddenly, we were propelled forwards at high speeds, yet we did not fall. It was a most curious sensation indeed.

“My dear captain... what is this?” I asked her.

“This, gentlemen, is called a turbolator,” she explained. “The *Endeavour* is a very large ship, you see, and so we invented these to move between decks more quickly.”

“I see...” Holmes remarked, and for once in my life, I had the occasion to see something I had never seen before... the great Sherlock Holmes, utterly baffled. He was hardly alone in that.

Holmes was able to deduce several details about her, which he whispered to me as we went along. She was obviously military, and seemed to be a veteran of a great and terrible war, greater even than the Afghan conflict I had once been a part of.

Remembering my own service and how those of us who came back carried themselves, this rang true.

Further, the lack of the gentle rocking motion that accompanies a ship at sea was absent... which Holmes suggested must mean we were not on water at all.

This... turbolator soon came to a halt, and a door swished open. She led us out down a short hallway, and into a room

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that was quite unlike anything Holmes or I had ever seen before. It was rather angular in shape, with three levels: the top level contained banks of screens, at which stood men and women of all sorts, tapping at things and looking very serious about it.

Directly in front of us was a long rectangular console with even more screens attached to it, at which stood a raven-haired woman with scarlet-coloured eyes. On the next level, directly below this console, were three chairs, all very comfortable, though the centermost one was larger and had armrests.

The final level, and the lowest of the lot, merely contained two additional work areas, with chairs and consoles. Two more people sat at these, and paid Holmes and I no attention at all. In front of these two was an enormous window, through we could see stars surrounding us.

“My God, Holmes!” I cried. “We’re adrift in the heavens!” “No, not adrift,” explained the captain, turning to face me. “The *Endeavour* is a starship, capable of travelling through space, just as the steamships of your time travelled through water.”

“And what year is this then, dear lady?” asked Holmes.

“It is the year 2216,” the captain answered. “Welcome, gentlemen, to the twenty-third century.” She narrowed her eyes at my companion, and her next words had the steel of a commanding officer in them: “You will address me as either ma’am, or Captain, Mr. Holmes. The same for Dr. Watson.”

It was the last thing I heard her say. My vision swam and I felt myself topple over, in a dead faint.

\* \* \*

When I came to, I was lying on a bed in what was undoubtedly a sickbay... though as with everything else I had seen since departing Baker Street, that was as familiar as it got. My attending physician saw me and called over: “Captain? He’s awake.”

Captain Shadow approached, a new expression of genuine concern in her eyes. “I’m glad to see you are awake at last, Dr. Watson... not many people faint when they see the bridge of my ship for the first time.

“I *am* over three hundred years out of my time, Captain,” I said crossly. “Am I hurt?”

“Nothing except a bump on the head from the fall,” said my physician. “He’s cleared to leave, ma’am.”

Shadow nodded. “Very well. Dr. Watson, with me.” We left the sickbay, and entered another of those turbolator cabs. It conveyed us to the bridge, and she led me briskly across it to a door marked “Ready Room.”

Inside, I could see a large curved desk that dominated the place, with a wheeled chair behind it, and several smaller chairs for visitors. Directly across from this was a sofa that ran the length of the wall, with windows to let in the view.

A wall close to the desk had a bookshelf laid into it, crammed full with works of both fiction and nonfiction inside. Decorating the place was an assortment of objects I could not even begin to catalogue, but must have been items collected by our hostess on her travels. Last of all, between the desk and sofa, was a small shelf that seemed to glow with light.

Holmes was here, browsing the captain’s book collection, while a white-haired woman sat on the couch, watching me. “What have we got here, Cap’n?” she asked with a strong Irish brogue.

“Sheer impossibility, Number One,” replied the captain. “Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, allow me to introduce my first officer, Commander Caiomhe MacMurrough.”

The Irishwoman waved. “Gentlemen. I see you’re as out of your time as I am.”

“Very astute of you, Commander,” Holmes said, nodding his head in MacMurrough’s direction.

Shadow, meanwhile, went to the glowing shelf and spoke to it: “Tea. Earl grey. Hot. Four cups.” The machine began to hum loudly, and through some phantasmagorical process, four cups of tea simply shimmered into existence, along with a

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serving tray. She handed us each a cup and went to sit behind her desk, very much the queen in the castle.

“Now then, gentlemen,” she said, looking between Holmes and I. “Kindly explain how precisely you appeared in my cargo bay.”

Holmes made to take out his pipe and light it, but a stern glare from the captain put paid to that at once. So instead, he simply sipped his tea. “For some weeks now, Watson and I have been occupied with a mystery unlike anything he and I have faced before - great tears have opened all across London, from an abandoned house to my own rooms at Baker Street. And one of these tears...”

“Led to my ship,” the captain finished for him. “Yes... I had my science department analyse this tear of yours. They determined it was benign, and not actually a tear in the bulkhead, as I had first assumed when it appeared. Lieutenant MacPherson wondered how it could be that two fictional beings,” she indicated Holmes and myself, “could be standing before us. Further tests indicated that you are, in fact, of another universe entirely.”

Holmes considered the book in his hand, and as I read the spine, I was astounded to learn it contained my own notes... except credited to a Mr. Conan-Doyle. He held the book up for the captain to see and said, “That *would* appear to be the case, Captain. I put it to you now: what is to become of us? Are we marooned here, in this place and time?”

“I should hope not, Mr. Holmes,” said the captain, sipping from her tea cup. “But as the tear did not close behind you when we left the cargo bay, I think it’s safe to assume you will be able to leave just as you arrived.”

She opened her mouth to say something else, when a voice emanated from the ceiling: “*Captain, incoming transmission from Fenrir Prime.*”

“I’ll take it in here, Commander Verger,” answered the captain, and at once another shimmering image appeared in front of the desk, between Holmes and I. The being it depicted... well. It certainly wasn’t human. Rather, it appeared



to be like a wolf, except it stood upright. From what I could see, it had grey fur with patches of cream here and there... and it seemed to know the captain.

“Chancellor Catarrah!” the captain said, smiling for the first time since we’d met her. “How wonderful to see you again, my friend!”

“As it is to see you, Captain Shadow,” the wolf replied in a rumbling growl of a voice. “I only wish the circumstances were more pleasant.”

Shadow’s smile faded at once. “Chancellor, what has happened?” she asked.

“A most gruesome murder has been committed, Captain,” said the wolf. “Right in the Hall of State. Our teams have so far been unable to determine the cause. We will need your assistance if we are to solve this mystery.”

Shadow nodded solemnly. “We’ll get there as soon as we can, Chancellor. I’m very sorry for your loss... *Endeavour* out.” The wolf’s image disappeared, and the captain stood up, finishing her tea before leading us out back onto the bridge. She took up the centre chair, while her Irish companion sat to her right. Holmes sat down in the empty chair to her left, and I stood beside him.

Shadow began issuing orders in that familiar bark all officers seemed to develop: “Helm! Set course for the Fenririan system, Alcubierre factor six!”

I watched as the helmsman began tapping at his screen several times. “Course laid in, Captain,” he said.

Shadow pointed forward, as if to suggest forward momentum. “Engage!” she cried, and the view of the stars appeared to elongate... we were away.

\* \* \*

As we travelled, I listened to Holmes inquire of the captain how it was her vessel could travel through space. “Technically, it doesn’t,” she explained. “The Alcubierre drive functions by creating... well, a bubble of spacetime. Said bubble then

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compresses space ahead of it and expands behind it. In essence, instead of trying to accelerate the ship past the speed of light, we move space itself around the ship. To the naked eye, however, we appear to be moving.”

Holmes took all this in quietly, I could see the inner workings of his mind attempting to process this. I admit I hardly understood it myself, but when explained as simply as that... I suppose it could work. All Holmes said in the end was, “...I see.”

Shadow smirked at him. “It is elementary, my dear Holmes. ‘When you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.’”

As I tried very hard not to laugh, Holmes rolled his eyes and said nothing more.

\* \* \*

Soon, the space bubble popped and we appeared outside... well. Another world, quite frankly. The landmasses we could see were purple in colour, and the planet was surrounded by three large moons, equal in size to our own. Holmes and I simply stared, awestruck. Wherever we were now, it certainly wasn't near the Earth.

Fortunately, the captain answered our unspoken question by tapping a button on her chair's armrest. She began to speak: “Captain's log, solar date 2/1603.20: We are in orbit of the planet Fenrir, in response to a request by Chancellor Catarrah of the Fenririan Republic. A murder recently took place within the Hall of State's chambers, and we have been asked to investigate.”

The ship's crew took no notice of this, but Holmes gave her an odd look as she rose from her chair. “It is proper procedure for a commanding officer to accurately report on ship activities,” she explained. “It is a little odd at first, I will grant you, but in time you adjust to it.”

MacMurrough grinned. “Besides, she has an excellent reading voice.”

## Watson

Blushing faintly, Shadow made for another sliding door. “You have the bridge, Number One!” she said. “Ms. Verger, Mr. Holmes, Dr. Watson, with me!”

We dutifully followed after her.

\* \* \*

The captain led us to a large room filled with small craft she described as being shuttles. Climbing into one, we chose seats, and she and Commander Verger (the raven-haired woman I mentioned before) piloted the little craft down to the planet. As we landed and exited the shuttle, Holmes and I could see the world appeared to be shrouded in perpetual twilight, and the air was quite chilly. Still, there was plenty of light to see by.

We then hurried to a large building that looked much like the Houses of Parliament, except all the people inside were of the lupine variety. Chancellor Catarrah herself led us into the central meeting hall, where the legislature sat. And there, on the marble floor, was a corpse. A dead wolf, brown with patches of white in its coat.

While Shadow and Verger went around the room interviewing the local population, Holmes and I bent over the body. The surroundings may have been wholly alien, but in this moment it felt like any other case he and I had solved together. All I could see was a corpse, but I knew my friend’s deductive skills were hard at work.

After a time, I asked: “So... what of it, Holmes? Who might the culprit be?”

“Moriarty,” Holmes replied.

“But that cannot be!” I cried. “The professor is dead! “Isn’t it more likely that who we have encountered is some sort of... imposter?”

Holmes nodded. “That’s the disquieting thing about this, Watson. If the captain’s hypothesis regarding our own origins is correct, then is it not also the case that Moriarty is from another dimension, as you and I are? After all, the last time we

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met him, left behind a residue in the act of making his escape. And now, it is here, on this corpse. He *is* the man we are looking for.”

I thought about this. “I suppose that *is* the only reasonable conclusion... but what do we do?”

“We return to Baker Street,” said Holmes at once. “This world of space ships is too distracting.”

I found myself agreeing. The world in which Captain Shadow lived may have been normal for her, but for us... well. Perhaps that Wells fellow might enjoy it more than we did.

\* \* \*

The captain, much to our relief, agreed with our plan when we informed her. She had only one request: to return with us to Baker Street, to render assistance in solving Moriarty’s latest scheme. Holmes initially tried to override her, but the captain was firm: her own deductive abilities were a match for his, and she knew his previous cases intimately.

Holmes, eventually, relented... with the proviso that Shadow retired to a safe house near Baker Street, owned by his brother Mycroft. The safe house had been set up when the first of the rips appeared, and would allow her to remain close while also being inconspicuous.

Shadow agreed, and together the three of us returned to the cargo bay where all this madness had begun, and finally home to Baker Street. I breathed a sigh of relief as I stood in the small, comfortable drawing room, and even at the sight of rain pouring down the windows. The captain could have her sailing ship, this was where we belonged.

“Mr. Holmes!” cried Mrs. Hudson, as all of us appeared. “Where in blazes have you been?!”

Holmes’s reply was deadpan as could be imagined. “...Where none have gone before, Mrs. Hudson.”

## 6. Dark Dealings

... as Sherlock and I walked down the street, rushing towards our next destination with the determination of wolves stalking their prey, I was halted by the feeling of a boney hand tugging me in the opposite direction.

My first instinct was to bat it away and yell some crude expletive [**What is your stance on mild swearing during the segment?**].

The owner of the hand - a rather old, skeletal man wearing thick, grey robes - let go of my arm and smiled apologetically, "I'm sorry, really, it's unprofessional of me, but it was the only way I could halt your movement. You're the great Dr. John Watson if I'm not mistaken?"

By this point, Sherlock had noticed I wasn't in lockstep with him and had turned around in hopes of retrieving me, "Indeed he is."

"I can speak for myself," I said forcefully.

The man held out his hand towards me, "Pleasure to meet you. As far as I know, my legal name is just 'The Man in Grey', so feel free to call me that."

I politely shook his hand. Normally I wouldn't, but you have to understand how rare it is for someone to see me and Sherlock on the street and specifically desire to see me rather than my companion. It was quite flattering.

"Based on your rather peculiar name, I assume you're another one of these Interlopers that have been popping up all over London?" asked Sherlock.

"Sort of," responded the Man in Grey, "my group noticed a sort of anomaly within your collection of universes - we

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generally refer to yours as ‘The Dawns’ - and I realised it was just the perfect opportunity to... well, make ourselves known to your lot. In short, my presence is more deliberate than some of the people here.”

“Good for you.” said Sherlock before placing his hand on my shoulder, “Come on Watson, we don’t need to bother with this one.”

But I refused to move. This one person wanted me, and I’d be damned if I didn’t learn what for, so I shook off Sherlock’s hand and approached the Man in Grey, “Why did you want to talk to me specifically?”

Sherlock huffed in annoyance, “Watson, come on, we don’t have all the time in the world here, the universe is at stake!”

The Man in Grey chuckled softly, “I won’t take up much of your time, Dr. Watson.” He then looked up at Sherlock, “Mr. Holmes, how about you go away for a bit while I talk business with your associate?”

“We’re not joined at the hip, you know. We can be separate sometimes.” I added.

“Fine,” said Sherlock forcefully. I think he growled a bit as he left, though I can’t be sure.

The Man in Grey smiled, “Good, we’re alone.”

He calmly walked me over to the outside table of a nearby cafe, complete with pre-made cups of tea that can’t have been made too long before our encounter, since the liquid was piping hot. Despite being strangers, I noted how mine seemed to be made exactly to my liking (including the more shameful addition of three spoons of sugar, judging by the taste).

“Right,” said the Man in Grey, “let’s talk business. If I understand your arrangement correctly, you write narrative accounts of real-life adventures you’ve had with Mr. Holmes, and then you publish them?”

I nodded, “Indeed. Well, the publishing is usually handled by my Literary Agent, as well as most of the editing, but yes.”

“Ah yes, Mr. Doyle. I’ll have to speak with him later.” He took a sip of his tea, which seemed grey in colouration, before

continuing his previous train of thought, “You see, I’m not just your average vaguely-human entity wearing dark robes. Far from it. I am the head of what some are calling a revolutionary public service that operates in multiple universes and many many times.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand a word of this—”

“But you can write it down. You’re quite the virtuoso when it comes to mindlessly repeating a series of points in precisely the way you were asked to; you’re an advertiser’s dream!”

At this point, he reached under the table and pulled up a peculiar red device. The main body had a white wheel on it, and the edges were lined with the numbers 0-9.

Whilst I remained confused, the Man continued speaking, “Imagine; you’ve woken up in the morning. You have to meet someone for lunch, maybe your wife—”

“My wife died.”

“Oh. Sorry for your loss.” After a solemn pause, he went back to smiling, “Anyway, you need to get your keys to lock up before you head out, but, oh no, you can’t find them!”

“Well, either Sherlock or Mrs. Hudson could—”

“They’re both dead in this hypothetical.”

“Well, that’s just preposterous. I know Sherlock’s methods, he is most likely indestructible—”

“Then he’s pretending to be dead, as he is prone to doing. Now, you can’t be late, so you don’t want to spend hours finding your key, correct?”

“Well, I can just reschedule—”

“SHUT UP!” he snapped, “I’M TELLING MY STORY, YOU’RE NOT THE EDITOR!” [I hope this doesn’t make you seem too unlikeable, I can edit if it does, I’ve done it before.] After this outburst, he slumped back in his chair, took a sip of his grey tea, and continued, “Anyway. That’s where the Multidimensional Finders Service comes in. Just take any telephone device and dial [What was the number again?], and our responders will promptly tell you where your lost object is. It’s that simple!”

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One of my eyebrows involuntarily arched in suspicion, “This sounds like poppycock. [**Is that term alright? I would normally censor myself, but most of the synonyms didn’t have the same punch.**.]”

He detached a part of the red item (a telephone apparently) and handed it to me. The red item was shaped like a bracket, with both ends fitting over my ear and mouth.

“If you don’t believe it, then try it yourself,” he said.

He used the circle to type in the number he told me about. After an odd ringing sound, there was a click, and a tired woman’s voice came from the other end, “Hello, Multidimensional Finders Service, how may I help you?”

I froze. I had no idea what to say.

The Man in Grey looked with impatience, “Just ask her to find something.”

“Hello?” asked the woman.

After seconds of panicked thinking, the only question I could muster was “Where’s Sherlock?”

Almost instantly, the woman responded, “He’s hiding in a bush to your left.”

I looked to my left and, sure enough, I saw the neatly combed hair of Sherlock Holmes quickly duck behind the bush.

I turned to the Man in Grey in amazement.

He grinned ear to ear, “As you can see, our product is simple and effective.” he took the phone away from me before pulling up a grey briefcase from under the table, “Now... I’ll pay you a large sum of money for you to incorporate a sponsored segment for the Multidimensional Finders Service in your next Sherlock Holmes story.

I can’t recount further due to the NDA I signed. So, readers, use [**number here**] to call the M.F.S. and find what you’ve lost today! And remember, if you use the offer code “JohnLock” during your call, it doesn’t do anything on your end, but it gives me a bit of extra cash. Now, on with the story!



Watson

[So, here's the sponsored segment, let me know if I need to make any edits. Also, I hope you're alright with the offer code I chose. Sherlock was rather displeased when I agreed to the sponsorship, so I wanted to make a code that referenced him in conjunction with myself as a gesture of friendship.

Sincerely,  
Dr. John Watson]

## 7. The Adventure of the Golden Bull

The alleyway was dark and narrow, a dead end barely wide enough for two men to walk in side-by-side, and certainly not for a cab. Rotting wooden crates and indistinct piles of refuse, some of which, on second thought, may well have been sleeping vagrants swaddled in tattered blankets, further restricted entry into the passageway, although they seemed to cluster around the mouth which connected the nameless alleyway to Richardson Street, such that, after our initial struggles, Holmes and I were rewarded with a clearer path forwards.

The young woman who had retained Holmes's services displayed an uncanny ability in making her way through the detritus — and this, despite a slight limp that her faded skirts could not have concealed from a doctor's gaze, even had she not carried a heavy walking stick, some thick piece of wood inexpertly salvaged from a ship or a bannister for use as a cane. It was nothing serious; barring closer examination, I mentally diagnosed the girl with no more than a twisted ankle, perhaps a week old. The fact which clawed at my heart was that she was out and about, heedless of the probable pain, so soon after the event; were she one of my patients, I would have recommended home rest for two weeks at least, but not only was she evidently not in a financial position to afford such luxuries, the thought had clearly never crossed her mind.

Eventually, she in front, Holmes at her heels, and me following behind as best I could, we turned a corner and found the body.

“There he is, sir —” said the girl, suppressing a rush of emotion. “That’s where I found him. There’s Rodge.”

Immediately, I knelt at the young man’s side and began to examine him. He was indeed dead — not that I would have expected Holmes’s client to be wrong on this, well-versed in the darker aspects of life as she obviously was.

The precise nature of his injuries, however, was a great surprise. From her description at 221B Baker Street, I had expected an ordinary bludgeoning, the bruised, bloody aftermath of a mugging or a fistfight; but there was not a single bruise on young Master Banksley’s face, not a scratch. His hair, though imperfectly cut, had been combed recently enough, and nothing had thrown it into more than wholly incidental disarray. All these things were uncharacteristic of a fistfight with a tragic end, or even a scuffle with a criminal.

No, the cause of death was obvious enough: Roger Banksley’s chest had been battered, crushed inwards by two or three superhuman blows. They hadn’t penetrated his thick flaxen coat or undershirt, sparing us the sight of even worse horrors, but that spectacle enough, and the stains of blood visible through the fabric, did not leave even me, a medical man, wholly unshaken. Though this was obviously not the first she glimpsed of the grisly tableau, the sight of her brother so reduced had an even starker effect on Miss Agatha Banksley, as well it might.

“Oh, poor Rodge,” she said. “It... it was just the two of us, you know. Just the two of us in the house. We were closer than anything.”

Out of the corner of my eye I saw her grasping for Holmes’s arm, which, after a moment’s confusion, he wordlessly granted, silent and immovable as she leaned on him for support both emotional and physical.

“Well, Doctor?” Holmes asked me once he saw that I had finished my examination.

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“Most dashed peculiar thing, Holmes,” I replied. “At first glance, I’d say this man was trampled by a horse. But —”

“— no adult-sized equine could make its way in and out of this place,” my friend finished in my stead; “at least, not without causing a considerable disturbance whose aftermath would still be in evidence.”

“Yes, quite. But that’s not all,” I added. “I have *seen* trampling victims. The imprint of a horse’s hoof is very particular. This is close — but not right. Narrower, and I find no evidence of a metal horseshoe. And — look,” I said, motioning for him to join me.

With a nod, Miss Banksley relaxed her grip on his forearm, and Holmes stepped forwards, half-crouching beside me.

“What do you suppose *those* are?” I asked, pointing at the strange objects I had noticed, stuck to the fabric of the shirt by the dried blood.

Obviously not sharing my qualms about disturbing the evidence firsthand, Holmes reached forwards with his svelte, agile hand and plucked one from the deathly grime, holding it up in front of his face and inspecting it even as he got up and turned away from the cadaver to face Miss Banksley once again.

“Fascinating. A clipping of gold thread...”

“One of many,” I supplied.

“Yes, so I observed, but I only need the one sample. I wonder...”

For a moment, his grey eyes burned with that particular fire which I knew to indicate that his great mind was throwing itself into the task of unravelling a worthy puzzle. And yet, as soon as it had arisen, the spark faded, his black brows tightening as he clenched his fist around the piece of gold thread and lowered his arm.

“What’s the matter, Holmes?”

“Only my ongoing *frustration* with this — this *plague* of — of supranatural phenomena!” he suddenly exploded, startling Miss Banksley, and myself, into taking a step back from our volatile friend. “This ‘Rifts Crisis’, as the Fooling Fish termed

it. A man of science must never ignore the evidence that faces him; I accept the reality of these — absurdities. But I do not... *condone* it. These clues, this puzzle, this impossible predicament —”

“What is it?”

“They could be the greatest intellectual challenge of my career,” Holmes said in a defeated voice. “They *should* be. And yet, with the way things have been carrying on... I have no doubt, no doubt at all, that things are *precisely* as they seem. One of these spatial warps must have transported some — some great beast into this alleyway and out again, in defiance of all physical laws. A golden ram, perhaps, with a golden fleece, which shed some hair on its victim as it gored him. No less tragic than an ordinary murder, but so much less... oh, I can scarcely find the words.”

“I share your frustration, old friend, in my own way,” I confessed, frowning. “Why, I sometimes feel as though these disturbances in the cosmos have been disturbing *me*. I reread some of my notes, from our last few cases, all the ones relating to these ‘Rifts’, and they all seem to have been written by different men entirely.” I sighed. “But, as you once told me — sometimes, the improbable is the truth. A man’s life has been taken; this young woman is relying upon us. We cannot let aesthetics cloud our judgement.”

Holmes’s eyes darted towards Agatha Banksley again, and his expression softened.

“...Yes, Doctor. Quite right. *Quite* right.”

He straightened his jacket and began pacing further into the alleyway.

“First things first!” he announced, “let us see if that Rift is still visible.”

\* \* \*

Despite Holmes’s renewed convictions, it was empty-handed that we eventually said goodbye to Miss Banksley,

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though not before helping her to carry the body back to her home for the wake and final respects.

(Given his certainty that the true culprit had left this plane, Holmes thought it better not to involve the Yard, instructing Miss Banksley to report her brother as an accidental death devoid of mystery, and promising to vouch for her story if necessary — an oath to which I naturally joined myself.)

We returned to our lodgings at 221B Baker Street in the early evening, to find that a few letters and bills had been delivered in our absence, Mrs Hudson had made dinner, and there was a giant, golden ox in the drawing room.

The beast had sat down on its haunches, taking up as little space as possible. It was not only its fur which was of a bright, golden hue, but its hooves, its skin, even its eyes — it was as a statue, incredibly lifelike and magically alive. It perked up as it saw us come in, and tilted its horned head in what I recognised, through my bafflement, as a greeting.

I shan't burden the reader with a transcript of the somewhat undignified utterances which finally found their way out of my throat. Holmes, for his part, was content to raise an eyebrow as he took off his hat and hung it meticulously on the hat-rack.

"Ah. Hello," he said. "I hope this surprise is a pleasant one."

"Mr Holmes?" asked the golden bull. Its voice was warm and pleasant, though it had an odd tinny quality, and a tone whose pitch was subtly unlike any human voice I had ever heard. "Mr Sherlock Holmes?"

"That is correct," answered the Great Detective, "and this is my associate, Doctor Watson. And whom —"

"Orotoro, sir," said the creature, bowing its head again. "You'll forgive me if I don't rise — I hurt my hind legs when I fell out of that Rift. It — wait. Sorry. I... *think* you're already aware of the Rifts?"

"That is correct," said Holmes with a small, tight-lipped nod. "What do *you* know of the phenomenon?"

“Only the basics, sir. The worlds are cracked, some times and places more than others. My own world, the 347th Universe — my own planet — we’ve been hit very badly by them, sir. But it’s not all bad. It let me come here.”

“And that was a good thing, was it?” Holmes asked sceptically.

“Yes — well, I think so — you don’t know what —” The golden bull paused. “Oh. *Oh*. You’ve already heard, haven’t you? But sir, that’s just what I came to you about. I wondered about the risk, but, well, your Mrs Hudson was very sweet about everything, and I thought, altogether, I’d be safer indoors —”

“Yes, yes. Get to the point, my good m — my good b — get to the point. What did you come here for?”

The bull took a deep breath, which would have been rather frightening if I hadn’t already been compelled to check out my handle on reality at the door.

“Mr Holmes, I believe I’m being framed.”

Holmes’s eyes widened.

\* \* \*

Miss Banksley opened the door herself. Early as it was, she had already changed into a mourning dress which, despite its sombre colour and occasion, looked distinctly more fetching than the ragged skirts of yesterday.

She seemed surprised to see Holmes and I — and, for just a moment, displeased.

“Good morning, Miss Banksley,” Holmes said, his manners a thinner veneer than ever; “ever so sorry to disturb you on such a... painful occasion. May we come in? We have news concerning your brother’s death.”

“You do?” she said, her weary, exhausted expression brightening into a smile which seemed just a little bit too eager — even to herself, it seemed, for she suppressed it just as quickly as she stepped aside to let us in. “I — why — that’s —

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I can't thank you enough for doing this for me gentlemen. Have you found — that is, what have you discovered?"

"Why, nothing short of the identity of the *killer*," said Holmes as he strode in.

The Banksley house, I now realised, was not the hovel that its present owner's clothes had led me to assume. It was smaller than our own quarters at Baker Street, and in poorer condition, but it was without a doubt a house, the home of a craftsman of some kind. There were fringed, decorative curtains at the window — drawn, of course, given the solemn occasion — and napkins on the furniture; the wallpaper was elaborate to the point of tackiness, although it was peeling slightly in the corners.

Holmes made a beeline for the umbrella stand, which would have surprised me if I had not known his purpose, for he was not carrying an umbrella. He checked it briefly then turned aside to face Miss Banksley again.

"So what — who was it?" the young woman urged him. "I — I deserve to know! Was it one of those otherworldly creatures from those — those Rifts you mentioned? Did you kill it?"

"I should think *not*," said Holmes, the corner of his mouth curling into the edge of a fierce, almost predatory smile. "Oh, no, Miss Banksley, the killer is as human as you and I. I'll admit, for a moment London's current instability did... *disorient* me. But no one pulls the wool over Sherlock Holmes's eyes."

"The *golden* wool, mh?" I felt compelled to add, though Holmes shot me a glance which made me mildly regret speaking up.

"I — I don't —" the grieving woman stammered, before she seemed to get a flash of inspiration. "Oh! Like the golden hairs you found on poor Rodge's body?"

"Yes," said Holmes. "Only, they weren't golden hairs at all. Just pieces of golden thread. Not even real gold — just thread. Like —"



He paused, looking meaningfully away from Miss Banksley's eyes, and waiting for her to turn and follow his gaze.

"— well, like the fringe of those decorative curtains you have here, for example."

Her eyes snapped back towards him, unblinking and defiant.

"Then there was the matter of the wounds. So high up in his chest, with not a mark anywhere else. He could have fallen to the ground first, of course —"

"Well, yes, of course —"

"— but the angle was such that he simply *had* to have been *facing* his attacker, if indeed it was an animal. If he'd simply tripped, he would have most likely been trampled from the *side*, but that wasn't the case."

"But surely —" The woman gave a nervous, desperate smile, bearing her surprisingly well-groomed teeth. "— surely the beast tackled him down, even as it crushed him? Jumped down at him from the Rift?"

"So you picture this Rift as having appeared high in the air, rather than at ground level?"

"I — yes?"

"A very interesting assumption, Miss Banksley. A very lucky guess. If it were a guess. But as to that other theory — no. Doctor?"

"At such a velocity," I explained, "your brother's skull would have fractured on the pavement; which it plainly hadn't."

"No, the only way these injuries could have been sustained from the hooves of a beast would be if it had raised itself on its hind legs."

"And what's so implausible about that? Horses do it all the time. I'm sure a bull —" She froze, "A bull or, or other whatever other beast —"

"My, my, Miss Banksley, you are full of very lucky guesses today," hummed Holmes. "It's implausible because we have met your purported suspect, and it transpired that it — or

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rather he — broke one of his hind legs two days ago. On the very same occasion, as a matter of fact, when he fell out of that fateful Rift... as I'm sure you certainly *didn't* witness, of course. Ah, lots of leg injuries in this case. That wooden cosh of yours, where is it?"

"My what?"

"Your walking stick, Miss Banksley," I supplied.

She blinked, and seemed to relax, standing straighter and steadier.

She stared at Holmes and myself, unflinching.

"Oh, I'm sorry, did you want a look at it? I threw it away."

"You... already disposed of it?" I repeated, baffled.

"Yes," she said, visibly suppressing a smile. "I needed some firewood. I'm really *terribly* sorry if, perchance, you had some sort of a mad theory for which you meant to trump up my poor walking stick as some kind of *evidence*, but you'll have to do without it."

"But your leg!" I protested.

"My —?" Her smile fell, the colour draining from her face. "My... what?"

"Your leg," I repeated accusingly. "Your limp. You had it yesterday, quite badly, and now you mean to convince me that it has vanished entirely, to such an extent that you would throw your crutch into the fire? Impossible. *Balderdash.*"

Holmes put an arm around my shoulder, a gesture — somewhat to my chagrin — more theatrical than it was affectionate.

"And good Doctor Watson, an accredited physician, will testify to that in court, if the need arises. Or should I say *when*, Miss Banksley? *May* we rely on a confession?"

The murderer stood frozen for a few moments, holding in a breath, then exhaled like a steam exhaust as she collapsed into the nearest chair.

Letting go of me, Holmes walked a few paces to the side to keep face-to-face with Miss Banksley, who looked glumly up at him for a moment, then averted her gaze.

He stood there, expectantly, until at last she spoke.

“He... he wouldn’t sell the house,” she said in a blank voice. She looked up; her eyes were wet, though she wasn’t quite crying. “Had us both deep in debt, with his damned gambling... but he wouldn’t let me, wouldn’t let us, sell and, move to the, to the countryside, make a new life somewhere. But the house was his. I had no say in it. I...” Finally, a tear ran down her cheek. “Sometimes, my brother got drunk, and he —” She paused again. “He wasn’t a good man, you know.”

“Perhaps not,” Holmes said thoughtfully, “but this was still murder. A brutal, premeditated murder.”

She made a noise which I thought at first to be a sob, but which I realised, a second later, had actually been words.

“I’m sorry?”

“I said,” she repeated, “it wasn’t *brutal*. He — I slipped something in his drink, *then* I... took him to the alleyway, and... well. He didn’t suffer. That’s all.”

“Well, that’s something, I suppose,” I huffed. “But you still tried to frame that — that cow fellow. An innocent m — well, an innocent. And however unpleasant your predicament, it wasn’t a life-or-death affair. Not at all.”

She looked up tearfully again.

“They’ll h —” Her voice choked out with a sod and she averted her gaze again. “They’ll hang me, won’t they...”

“That’s not up to me, or Doctor Watson,” Holmes said in a neutral voice. “We’re merely private detectives.”

She sniffed, forcing a bitter smile.

“And don’t I know it. Oh, if I’d tricked you... if I’d tricked you all the way through... vouched for by Sherlock Holmes. Perfect crime.”

“You got closer than most, I will grant you that much,” Holmes replied, with one of his theatrical little grins. “But not close enough. The truth always prevails. Even in days like these, *reality* prevails upon whatever... whatever fantasies the human brain devises.”

“I suppose it does,” sighed Miss Banksley. “But they will, you know. If you hand me over.”

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“Hm? Who will what?” I asked — I admit, with the benefit of hindsight, rather oafishly.

“Hang her,” Holmes explained. “But Miss Banksley, you haven’t been listening.”

“W-what?”

“Whoever said anything about handing you over to the police? I told you: I am but a humble *private* detective.”

\* \* \*

At first, Miss Banksley had understandable misgivings about the idea of being locked in a room for a few hours with the giant, metallic, interdimensional creature whom she had identified, at a glance, as believably likely to trample a man. However, the addition of Mrs Hudson’s tea and crumpet seemed to alleviate some of her anxieties, perhaps not so much through their inherent comforting qualities as by elevating the absurdity of her situation beyond that with which her normal emotional responses could cope.

I, myself, had doubts. It was not often I dared to question Holmes’s methods, but what remained of my common sense rebelled at the idea of leaving a proven murderer and their near-victim together for hours, and expecting *good* to come of it. Holmes, though, was practically walking on air, so pleased was he that a real, proper case had come out of this whole ghastly Rifts business after all.

“Holmes, are you sure —”

“Oh, my dear fellow, I am never sure of anything until I have seen results,” he replied cheerfully, an hour into the experiment. “But if you mean to ask: am I *confident* that I am right? Then the answer is yes.”

When she and Orotoro emerged from their jury-like seclusion, it was as fast friends. That was obvious from the very first sight of them as they walked out the door, for the woman was riding on the back of the golden bull; not so much like a rider on a horse, as like a young child on a large and friendly dog.

“We’re agreed,” Orotoro said in his gentle, thrumming voice. “We leave together.”

“Back to your own... world?” I inquired.

“Oh, no,” said the bovine. “I am a fugitive there, as she now is in hers. Though not for any crime I committed. I understand the custom of bullfighting is not unknown on this... ‘Earth?’”

“Oh. Oh, I see,” I nodded, blushing a little.

“That Rift which appeared in the middle of the Great Arena was... nothing short of a miracle,” he continued. “Much as my own appearance has been a miracle to Agatha, in more ways than one.”

“There are other Rifts,” said Miss Banksley, “appearing all the time, all throughout the city. I saw one by chance, just when I needed it. It shouldn’t take too long to find another one. And if each world these Rifts affect has its own flurry of them — well, we shall keep our options open if the first one we enter doesn’t suit.”

“We’ll find a place,” Orotoro said. “A good place. Some quiet countryside.”

“Yes.”

They stood there a moment in consideration of their dream, then began walking again, the great golden bull padding gently through the lobby, nimbly avoiding bumping into the furniture.

The rider turned one final time as they prepared to walk out of the threshold of 221B Baker Street.

“T-thank you for everything, Mr Holmes, Doctor Watson. I really am... grateful. And sorry.”

Too caught up in the bizarreness of the tableau to word a reply, I just stood silently and limply waved a hand. She turned away, and they walked out for good, turning onto the sidewalk and disappearing from view.

Holmes closed the door behind them and turned back to me, *smiling*.

I sighed good-naturedly.

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“Very well, Holmes,” I laughed, “I know when I’m beaten. *You told me so.* Ah, what strange times these are.”

Then I paused, my blood running cold.

“Holmes! Neither of these clients actually paid us!”

“I don’t believe that will be an issue,” said Holmes, suddenly leading me by the hand into the drawing room where Orotoro and Agatha Banksley had spent these productive two-and-a-half hours.

I almost laughed when I saw it.

There, in a little china bowl on the tea-tray, was a generous fistful of the Golden Bull’s solid-gold hair.

## 8. The Adventure on the Red Rock

Let me not repeat the ever-astonishing but unchanged particularities of stepping through a doorway to another world. Why should I dwell when events did not dwell for us? For this sojourn began and concluded as abruptly as any adventure I have had with my friend. Upon crossing the threshold, we found ourselves immediately faced with a [Dr. Watson's description of an adolescent Asian boy has been redacted out of respect for the sensibilities of a modern audience]. "What!" exclaimed the boy as he pulled out a thin cuboid and aimed it at us. "Another string to the bow of *Bashrat*, the *great extraterrestrial discoverer!*"

Around the corner came another boy of a similar [redacted], who immediately fixed my friend with a dumbstruck gaze. "Son of a dick," he said, "that's Sherlock Holmes."

If Holmes was shocked by such language, he did not betray it. He raised his pipe languidly in greeting.

The boy nearly bowled me over to shake Holmes' hand. "Honoured to meet you, Mr. Holmes. And, uh, surprised. Didn't think you were real. My name's Jae Hyun, my friend here is Bash—"

"*Bashrat*, the *great extraterrestrial discoverer!*"

"Yeah."

"A pleasure to meet you boys," Holmes smiled. Then he spoke to me in a lower and more serious voice: "Watson, I suspect the cracks have worsened. Bear with me a moment." He stepped over to a nearby window and gave a quick glance up and down. "It is as I feared. We are on the planet Mars."

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Jae Hyun gasped lightly and clutched a hand to his heart. I was not so easily entranced. “Great heavens, Holmes!” I ejaculated and shidded and farded. “Though I will never doubt your abilities, you must explain this conclusion if I am to believe it.”

“It is not so great a leap as it sounds, Watson,” Holmes smiled, amused. “Come, look outside.”

I followed the instruction and quickly saw what my friend meant: the very earth was red, and the sky a dusty pink.

“Red ground alone would be insubstantial evidence,” said Holmes, “as there is such terrain on our own world. But a pink sky seen through a dome...”

It was only once he said it that I realised it was true: I was not looking at this new sky unobstructed but through the glass of a great semispherical casing. I could only tell by a faint reflective sheen. How many miles away its apex was, I cannot reliably say; it was, and remains, unintelligible to me.

“If the portals have led us this far afield, then the situation is escalating faster than I anticipated. I need data, data, data.”

I turned to our company. “Perhaps one of you has a case for us?” I attempted. “It could be the reason we were summoned here.”

Bashrat was breathing heavily now, still holding the rectangle. From the lens, it appeared to be a small camera – truly the stuff of science fiction. “Sherlock Holmes is about to solve a case, and I’m going to have it all on film! I’m going to be *so important and respected!*”

My friend seemed unconvinced by my reasoning, but the boy Jae Hyun raised his hand as if asking permission to speak. “I’d like to ask Mr. Holmes a question.”

Holmes smiled. “By all means.”

“How,” said Jae Hyun, “do I tell a girl I like her?”

“No!” Bashrat yelped. “We need a real case!” The boy visibly wished that there had recently been a murder.

I felt myself grimace involuntarily. “I can handle this query if you would like, Holmes.” I felt confident I would be better



able to field the question as I had been married more times than any man of which I knew.

All at once, my friend seemed uncharacteristically defensive and drawn-up. “I am more than capable, Watson,” he sniffed. “Now, Jae Hyun. The main piece of wisdom I must impart to you in this matter is to not assume a woman is your intellectual inferior.”

“Oh yeah,” said Jae Hyun. “Equality for all. Her body, her choice.” He looked at Bashrat. “Did I do that right?”

“I’m pretty sure that was good, yeah,” said Bashrat.

Holmes cleared his throat. “Yes, well. What I mean is, if a woman tells you she is just stepping away, be careful not to take her at her word, because before you know it, she will have escaped.” He chuckled to himself. “Forgive me. I am making a joke for my own amusement. You see, I had my own—”

“Oh, I know the story,” Jae Hyun smiled.

Holmes bristled. “And how is that?”

“I’ve read loads of the stories!” the boy grinned. “They’re brilliant.”

My friend turned on me, suddenly quite irritable. “You wrote up the scandal in Belgravia for your rag?”

“You gave your permission!” I blustered.

“Well, I can hardly have meant it,” Holmes said unconvincingly, “or I would not have agreed if I knew so many would read it for so long. It was only meant to encourage your hobby. You are to stop writing these wretched, invasive accounts at once, Watson. Tell them all I died or somesuch.”

All at once, the portal behind us began to sputter and spark angrily. By intuition, I understood that we were about to be stranded on another planet, and my friend clearly believed the same. It is my regret that we could not speak more to those boys or learn about humanity’s future among the stars, but we had hardly a chance to say farewell. “Best of luck to you, chaps!” was the best I could manage.

“Thank you, Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson!” Bashrat wheedled after us. “You’ve given me the one thing I’ve always wanted—”

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We never did hear the end of that declaration, although, if I understood his general motivation, it may well have been “a great deal of money.”

Later, when I remarked on our abrupt exit and the great loss to science, Holmes seemed unperturbed. “They had no case for us. What difference does another planet make to my work?” he snapped. He spent the remainder of the afternoon playing Bach on his violin and stomping about the kitchen and muttering unintelligibly. This murky passion always came upon him after any discussion of ‘the woman’. Happily, my friend calmed his spirits once I made him some hot chocolatey milk.

## 9. The Adventure of Time and Place

I am asked rather often how one might slip something past Sherlock Holmes. As the answer is never popular, I do not feel reticent to print it here. In order to escape the attention of a great detective, one must simply be a small, inconsequential object that he has recently moved around himself.

Having, over the years, re-acquainted the man with many such objects—including lit pipes, delicate glass pipettes of unknown contents, his own shoes and my own glasses – it didn't surprise me that I made note of the anomaly first.

For an hour a day – the same hour, each day – any cup of liquid left unattended would appear to undrink itself.

“Spontaneous generation,” he muttered, when I waved a representative teacup between his nose and a tatty magazine.

“Disproven, some thirty years ago!” I replied. “And rather more relevant to fleas and suchlike. Can't think of an argument that it should apply to anything brewed, or distilled—unless we are are talking about a Biblical miracle, inside our flat.”

This achieved a Threshold of Peculiarity sufficient to draw his eyes away from the magazine. He stared into the sodden tea leaves, looking rather more matronly than mystical.

“Irrelevant.”

“Interesting though.”

“Irrelevant out of context.” He puffed his pipe and fluffed the magazine. “Put it back. I'll have a look tomorrow.”

I dreamed, that night, of displacement, longing and unfamiliar homes.

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Holmes was quiet in the morning when I rose – I could tell he hadn't slept, but not much else. There were places missing behind his eyes that would always be a mystery to me.

Nonetheless, I felt a reverberation each time his delicate fingers worked over a piece of glassware – something cold pressing up against the palms of my hands. That old injury ached, moving around my body like a snake. The guilt of an old soldier writhes like that, breaking out where joints wear and muscles begin to wither. One can only hope to hold it inside for so long. Trick oneself that it is medical, and responds to medicine. That sharp, singular knife.

I tasted the unfamiliar scent of horses, the old stink of blood, in the steam rising from my sacrificial evening cup of tea, and poured a measure of Scotch into it before taking a hearty sip.

“You should have made it precisely the same way,” Holmes didn't say, from across the room. I could sense his unsettlement strongly then—the clockwork man, missing a beat. I would have liked to hold him, put a hand around his shoulder, but I knew he took more comfort in my distance than my closeness in these moments.

Pipes stuffed, spirits poured, and dressing gowns wrapped firmly around ageing bellies, we proceeded to bravely not watch two cups of tea not being drunk.

Holmes followed the clock intently, as if reading a book.

“Tell me when it happens,” he whispered, at 5.50pm.

“Shall I look?”

“Of course not. Listen.”

“Listen for what?”

He took up my gaze directly, something he was generally careful to avoid. I understood why – he had eyes a careless man could fall into. This open gaze allowed him to see hungrily, like no other man. But I often wondered if it also left him more exposed than most.

“Whatever it was that made you notice the first time.” He lent back in his chair, drawing heavily on a pipe. “I don't think I can hear it.”

At 5.55pm,

At 5.55 pm

At 5

5

I don't believe I made a sound, but Holmes clasped my hand suddenly and I realised my lips were parted. It was startling, his skin so hot and cold at the same time. We rarely touched, and I felt momentarily drunk on the collision of a familiar image with an unfamiliar sensation. Home called, like death. A feverish cadaver.

"Time has been disturbed," he whispered, and I could feel the match striking inside his gut, the work upon him. It excited me too, the malignant hiss of the old injury fading, youth flooding through my veins.

He shot across the room to the teacups, picking his way across the shoes. I, suppressing a sudden and girlish laugh, took instead to the shoes – scattered across the floor in neat but uneven pairs.

"Holmes," I shouted, "did you see through this as well?"

He glanced back, and frowned, and hummed. He had not, being of the habit of leaving his shoes in such a fashion regularly – although never in such quantity.

And thus began our love affair with a brief lodger, madness. Each night and day, we would await the coming of 5.55pm with increasing ritual.

We wore nothing but the dressing gowns we had first worn. We ate nothing, and drank constantly, but from a diminishing number of vessels, as the idea of cleaning became suddenly absurd. I entered, sober (or something like it), the dreamworld of the narcotics addict. Sunlight became a contrivance to me, the architecture of the day instead determined by a great rolling boulder of pain and release. Doors lead to places, but never outside.

I was not at that time married, but I had been. I felt youth and age come upon me each day in rolling swells. Awake in the dawn hours I rarely frequented, with whisky and pipe as my companion, dressing gown hanging loose, played

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relentlessly at the same bar of music, I felt the glowing rush of a teenage boy in one of those first great summers. A warmth that would last forever, and yet faded as the day grew hot. I dreamed, wakefully, of unfamiliar homes. Thick blankets, the stink of horse again, caravans and foreign voices.

We made an attempt to record the passing of the days:

### A RECORD OF “THE MADNESS”

1. A peculiar insomnia has come over us
  
3. Today is present, and has already arrived
5. It has become difficult to count hours as objects
5. The time nature of object is apparent, an axis rarely seen but felt in the body
6. The newspapers appear accurate and yet we cannot remember why we believe this
5. We are adrift on a sea of time

We determined, by pipette, that every day, precisely 47 ml of fluid returned to Holmes’s cup, and 19.5 to mine. These numbers were Holmes’s idol. With these numbers and the ticking of the clock, he fashioned a thin thread which tied him to something – perhaps sanity.

Many hours, Holmes held my hand and spoke to me of the missing places. I wish I could remember his words – they felt eternal, hanging in an air thick with the beating of the clock. If the clock was a heart, we lived inside it, warm with the sharing of blood. I didn’t feel I needed to remember. I wish I had remembered to remember.

The guilt of an old soldier is this: we have all remembered the wrong things. So much kept, so much lost, and memories, so reluctant to listen. I do not bother to remember where I was shot, like Holmes does not bother with the maps of the stars – it was in the body. That was enough. That is enough.

I was holding his hand when I said,  
“The shoes – they dance!”

I laughed into my sleeve, not knowing my words had cut the belly of the air like a scalpel. Holmes released my hand, and sat up.

“They do dance Watson! They do dance!”

Like a great bird arising from a clutch of eggs, Holmes’s great pale legs shot out from underneath him and took him across the room. I lay and laughed and laughed, the sun setting like an egg cracked against our windowsill, running down the glass.

It was 5.45pm.

Holmes was rattling through drawers, sending china and glass flying. He emerged with something in his hand.

“A compass!” he shouted, before I could ask, measuring the angle of our teaspoons.

Jumping also to my feet, compelled by the force of his idea like a hound after its master, I found him an object of my own – a great map of the world. It took three doors to find what approximated my bedroom, a stagnant and dark space which seemed to be trying to hide itself from me. I ignored my own darkness, ignited by Holmes’s mission.

“Forty-seven north, Watson!”

“Nineteen-point-five East!” I shouted back, stumbling into the cooling light of the living-room via the backroom and a space I truly could not describe.

“Hungary.”

I held out the map to him. He nodded firmly.

“Hungarian dance, Bhrams” he whispered. “No. 5.”

“5.55 pm?” I said.

“That, Watson, and it’s the only Hungarian Dance I have for violin.”

“This is madness.”

“As we have discussed. But if Time itself is taking requests, who am I to turn it away?”

I lay on our sofa, an invalid. Holmes played. The tune was sharp, rich, and strange – it felt, itself, lost in time, aching for a moment that wasn’t, had never been. As a last, violent rush of

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sadness came over me, an invert ecstasy, I wondered how often Time got caught, like this – like fabric in a doorway.

It took strange men to notice, strange men to take the hand of Time, and tug it free. And like a busy man jerking his coat from the door of a cab and walking away, with a tip of the hat, that endless moment faded back into the busy crowd of seconds and hours.

“Will you be writing that one up?” Holmes asked. It had been days, and we had discussed none of it, except a schedule for the dishes.

“Of course.”

“You are a lunatic,” he said, with a thin smile.

“Of course,” I said, and placed his missing shoes by his feet.



## 10. A Study in Spectres

The days Holmes and I had spent dealing with the mysterious Rifts had taken a toll on us. My dear friend would have gone back to that accursed Seven-Percent solution of Opium had not Mrs Hudson made the keen decision to hide it while we had been out and about. The mess that had been made upon his inability to retrieve it was terrible, as was the shaking he underwent upon being unable to partake of it, but in the end he was grateful for our preventative measures.

"This case will be the end of me I fear," he mused, staring out the window. His sullen demeanour left me to worry if perhaps too much fight had been taken out of him, and began to miss the screeching of his violin.

"Perhaps we should go somewhere to get your mind off things--I know that this crisis continues but maybe if we were somewhere unrelated to it your mind might--"

Holmes snapped his head towards me, as though I'd just revealed the secret to life itself. "...Unrelated. Yes. Yes! Watson, I think you've found the key! None of this is unrelated!"

"...What do you mean?"

"Have you noticed a pattern in the beings brought forth into our world by these tears?" Watson frowned. "None at all, they seem to hold no common traits whatsoever!"

Holmes gave me a smile that showed just how far ahead of me he'd already reached. "Take Mars. Our very first encounter was with Miss Jhe, who of course comes from a future version of Mars. We have been to Mars, where we met the inquisitive, and inconsiderate of our time, pair of Jae Hyun and Bashrat.

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We encountered Captain Shadow, who if you recall was born on Mars."

I pondered this. "Well, that is all true... and yet is only a tiny smattering of what we have discovered! You can't draw a conclusion from only that."

"You are correct, and yet these are not the only connections worth noticing. Take our meeting with our friend the Golden Bull Orotoro--was not your mind taken to the Bull of Heaven from Sumarian Mythology, Gugalanna?"

"No Holmes, I can't say I ever would have considered that."

"Would you have considered the providence that not only ourselves but another pair of... inferior copies in the form of Herlock Sholmes and Doctor Wilson would appear? Or that another group drawn to us would have the association of being something of pranksters?"

"Yet again, I see no connections here at all. And I wouldn't say they were something of pranksters--indeed I'd say they would benefit from taking up a second hobby--"

"My dear Doctor, I suppose you simply haven't read up on your Sumarian Mythology in general."

"I dare say, that should have been your expectation rather than the other way around!"

Holmes rose, and went to a shelf to pull down a book which he flipped to a page in, and then held out to me. Taking it, I saw an artist's depiction of a bearded man holding a mace and sword. The description read: "Nergal: God of the Underworld, and husband of Ereshkigal." Holmes' finger led me back to the other page. "Associations: Mars, Bulls, Swords, Maces."

I followed his finger further.

"...Most remembered for the myth of Ereshkigal and Nergal, where the two engage in a battle of tricks and wits which eventually results in their marriage."

I looked up at Holmes. "...Are you saying that Moriarty is working with some sort of... deity?"

"I am saying exactly that, Watson. Now we must ask ourselves: why. And what are the pair attempting to bring to this world?"

Holmes turned his head again, and his thoughtful expression turned to one of joy as he looked down at something on the street below. I moved to see what he was looking upon--and there below us was Miss Jhe, waving up at us from the cobblestones, jumping up and down in a most excited and unladylike manner. Several people were staring at her.

"Come then Watson, it appears that she has something that will be most interesting to us, and just in time too."

We brought her up, and Mrs Hudson brought all of us some tea.

"So, I had to get away from the safehouse for a while--I was going absolutely nuts with how that Shadow lady kept telling me what future history was like--and I was like--no, it's not. That is not the future. Gongen is just not anything like she keeps saying it is! And so I was letting off some steam, stomping around, and then I came upon it."

"Came upon what?" I asked as prompted.

She spread her arms out. "A big house! And I know that doesn't sound like it's notable, but just listen--I could feel something was wrong about it. It had that feeling like the portals, but like, bigger, emanating out of the whole thing. I could feel a chill running down my spine, and with the insane amount of stuff I have to wear supporting my spine with these dresses like, that's saying something. You guys should invent hoodies already, you will thank me."

Holmes smiled, "I'm sure we will. So, did you investigate the house?"

She nodded, "Of course I did, I am so bored that I would recklessly walk into a bear trap for a change of pace. So I went up to the house, and knocked on the door. No reaction, so I just tried the doorknob and... surprise it was unlocked! So I was like, don't mind if I do, and slipped inside. And there was a whole hallway of doors."

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“Did you open them?”

She shook her head. “I could... feel the same feeling when I touched one I felt before. I knew immediately that there was something wrong with this house, that... behind each door, at least in my opinion... were likely portals, rifts.”

Holmes and I exchanged looks. “Then the game is truly afoot, I believe Miss Jhe you have found the centrepiece we have been long searching for to make sense of this mess. Lead us there posthaste, it's time to crack this case open.”

No time was wasted, and soon we had hailed a carriage and travelled all the way to the house. It stood firm and intimidating, its brick exterior more menacing than made sense for it to be.

The front door we opened cautiously, but it was unlocked just as Sang Mi had said, and the hallway beyond it just as she had described it; empty and cool.

“Well then, once more into the breach. We will likely learn much by the time we finish here, are both of you prepared to start, with all the consequences that may entail?”

Both of us nodded without hesitation.

We opened the first door, the knob was chill to the touch, and it creaked open with a slowness that matched my own hesitancy. The other side seemed familiar to a previous door we had passed through, and yet clearly was nothing like it in illogical tandem. I could well enough recognise it as Mars, but it was not the Mars we had seen before, or was spoken of by either Shadow or Sang Mi. The sky was the same shade, the ground the same shade of ochre, and even that the light was refracted through a huge glass dome. But it was not the same glass dome. Sang Mi stepped forward first, peering around with both curiosity and confusion. People walked by, their dress rather unlike her own we had met her in. Soldiers strolled by in handsome black dress coats with coloured trimming, singing jovially on break.

She stopped a woman who was walking by carrying a transparent bag that seemed to be filled with nothing but olive related products: jars of olives, dried olives, olive spread for

toast, truly a baffling selection. "Hey there, pop quiz from the-" and then she faded her voice out while making a noise, making the woman squint as though she'd missed a word, but Sang Mi did not stop long enough to allow her to think through the deception. "--all for a fabulous prize! What city are we in?"

"This is Erkh Choloo."

"On what planet?"

She laughed. "Mars of course?"

"And what's the capital of Mars?"

"Tarkanograd."

"What are your feelings on Martian independence?"

"...Well it's a good thing it happened?"

"And last question before you win our fabulous prize--who is the leader of Mars?"

"Why President Zhang Han, of course?"

"Great, thank you very much! You're our winner!" and she forced a wrapped caramel into her hand before shoving us through the doorway and shutting it.

"That version of Gongen was all wrong!"

Holmes was impassive. "It was not even called Gongen."

"And yet it still won independence from Earth! But the capital wasn't Kazuki! It wasn't President Sato!"

Holmes tried to reassure the girl with a smile. "There are many versions of Mars here, in different times. I believe this is part of why we're here." He then explained to her what he had explained to me back at 221B Baker Street. She nodded along, taking it all in.

"But if all those things are connected, what does this mean? What is Moriarty's plot?"

Holmes looked at the next door. "I cannot be certain yet, but I believe I have a.. solid suspicion as to what has been going on here. Let us examine the next door."

We stepped out onto yet another Mars, though Sang Mi seemed happier with this one. "This is home--this is Gongen!" She looked around, at the glass dome, at the people wandering about who were already giving us odd looks. "...Or perhaps it's not my Gongen."

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In the distance there was an incredible sight--a titan who was taller than buildings, their metal body glinting off the light. "Yeah, this isn't right either. But it's closer to home."

We opened a third door. From our conversations with Shadow, this may have been her home. Similar to the previous door, the horizon had more towering titans of metal that wandered around. I dared not ask why these futures had such terrors. Were they some monstrous automatons that had conquered humanity? The thought seemed ludicrous, and yet I could not fully comprehend them so it was hard not to let my fears wander. A large sign read, in several languages, "United Humanity Welcomes You to Miorine City! Home of the Miorine Rascals--2200 System Cup Champions!" A strange girl with skin so pale and thin you could see the veins running beneath it and eyes and hair of an unnatural blue turned to look at us, and spooked, we slammed the door shut, before all composing ourselves and pretending that nothing had bothered us in the first place.

Another we only briefly stared into had a Martian landscape of chalk-white monstrosities, octopoidal beings arming themselves for war like something out of the imagination of H.G. Wells, when suddenly they vanished in a chemical flash. Sang Mi slammed the door shut, explaining to us she feared us inhaling a toxic miasma from the blast. The scene haunts me still.

One more led us to a yet stranger Mars, where animals with machine parts labelled "Altern Corporation" were attacking the residents of Mars... who did not appear to be human. We left nearly as soon as we had arrived.

Finally we opened a door onto a familiar space. Jae Hyun and Bashrat were there, almost as though we'd walked in on them moments after the last time we'd seen them, only it clearly wasn't, as they were not wearing the same clothes.

"...Kalingkata?" Jae Hyun said.

"Oh, uh," Sang Mi replied. "Hi guys. What is... up?"

"Why did she get a cool new outfit?" Bashrat asked.

"...Well I sort of thought you'd be asking why I just opened a door through reality with Holmes and Doctor Watson but whatever."

"Oh, we already met them," Bashrat said with the air of someone who had eaten too much of their favourite food and grown tired of it.

Jae Hyun nodded. "...Wait but uh, we just saw you a few minutes ago?"

The door opened, and Sang Mi entered in, looking as slovenly as we'd first seen her, drinking some beverage in a rectangular container through a straw, which she promptly dropped.

"That's me."

"Oh hey," our Sang Mi said. "So there is a perfectly rational explanation for this."

"...I have so many questions. Are you really my Victorian AU version? Is this real?"

"No, I'm not your... wait that was the first conclusion you came to?"

Holmes coughed. "I believe this is not what we are looking for either."

The other Sang Mi looked at Jae Hyun, "Babe, what is going on here?"

"So, I guess I've got some stuff to explain honey..."

Our Sang Mi's eyes went wide. She glanced left. "...Babe?" And right. "...Honey? ...NO. NOPE, there's no way!" she shoved us back and slammed the door shut. "We're not opening that one again."

Holmes and I somehow found it impossible to argue with her tone of voice.

We opened every door one by one, until only one was left-the door at the end of the Hallway. Perhaps it could have been the first we opened, but thoroughness was necessary in our caution.

Of all of them, this was the most different, for instead of the landscape of an alien world, there was a stone staircase

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leading down into the dark. Stone gates blocked the path at certain areas, and cages with a glowing blue orb of light lit the abyss and its long winding path.

"What is this?" I asked breathlessly.

Holmes took the first step, his footfall echoing into the dark. "Welcome my friends, to Kur, the Sumerian Underworld."

I exchanged a look with Miss Jhe, and together we followed through. The three of us began our descent down the steps, into the land of death away from the stars.

Things whispered where they should not have been able to whisper, and the corners of my eyes seemed filled with things that followed us, but when I turned there was nothing but empty space and my own fear. When we reached the first of the stone gates, that was when the real test began. The whispers grew in volume, till they were deafening and yet no easier to understand. Then they fell silent and one booming voice rose clearly up from the depths.

"TRESPASSERS ON THE WORLD OF THE DEAD, WHY HAVE YOU COME HERE? SPEAK NOW OR FACE THE WRATH OF NERGAL."

I trembled, and Sang Mi took several steps back as though trying to sneak away from us and run away, before I looked at her and she awkwardly came back forward to stand with us. Holmes did not waver.

"You ask this of us, as though our presence is not what you desire, am I not correct?"

There was a silence, which grew somewhat awkward.

"...DO NOT DARE TELL THE GODS WHAT THEY DESIRE."

Holmes was smirking now. "Perhaps Ereshkigal could offer us her wrath instead?"

There was another silence.

"WELL, I MEAN, SHE WOULD, BUT SHE'S DOING OTHER STUFF RIGHT NOW."



Holmes sighed, "Let us call off this charade, I know what is going on, and would rather discuss this face to face, wouldn't you?"

A final pause, and then the gate crept open. We descended through the rest of the abyss on that stone walkway, until finally we reached the base: a grand but dark throne room filled with cages containing blue lights. Two thrones sat at the end of it, one empty, and one containing a swarthy man with a braided beard, and wearing a skirt woven with fine metals and jewels. In his hand was a mace with the head of a lion.

"...Welcome to Kur, Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, and Jhe Sang Mi."

Holmes bowed, and we followed suit. "You honour us with your grace, Nergal."

He waved off the niceties. "Tell me why you think I have allowed you here."

Holmes rose to his full height, eyes sparkling. "Because of course, you're looking for your wife."

I stared at Holmes. "...What do you mean?"

Nergal sighed. "...I see. You truly are as wise as your reputation."

"I was put off at first by Moriarty's involvement, until I realised that it was not in fact part of the puzzle itself, but a side effect of trying to solve it."

I tried to keep up with him. "...But Moriarty seemed to be the heart of this case?"

"Because he was, as I consult for Scotland Yard... he was the consulting criminal for the god Nergal. This may be presumptuous of me, but allow me to speculate?"

Nergal nodded.

"We have seen other worlds, other realities. Other paths of history that diverge from our own, sometimes radically. In one, Moriarty bested me during our encounter at Reichenbach Falls, only to become bored when he reached the top of the mountain. Controlling the entire underworld, he soon gained more power and money, and more power and money, but each time gave his heart diminishing returns. There is nothing so

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torturous for one who loves the struggle to become King but to win before you are satisfied with the journey, after all. He wanted a challenge, and found the world wanting. He wanted another chance to conquer a stronger and more agile foe. So he turned to the occult, and delving deeper into those arts, made contact with you. It was not that Moriarty was a key to this case, but that Moriarty was... readily available to you, am I on the right track?"

Nergal sighed, "You are frustratingly accurate, mortal."

"So when your wife ran out on you--"

"HOLMES!" I exclaimed. Sang Mi was trying to keep herself composed and covered her mouth.

"Calm yourself my dear Doctor. He is well aware of his own problems. And this is the problem, is it not?"

He nodded, though I could see him seething.

"With no way of telling where in the vast cosmos she had gone, you began making tears in reality, taking you to places where you could find associations with her. After all, your power is in the end, actually hers is it not?"

Sang Mi and I both tensed, and were not wrong to do so. The god rose, his eyes filling with an unending shadow. "YOU DARE SPEAK THAT WAY TO ONE BEYOND TIME AND SPACE? ONE WHO COULD RIP YOUR SOUL FROM YOUR SKIN WITH A FLICK OF MY HAND?"

"Yes," he replied. "Because I can give you what you want. I can find your wife."

Nergal stopped, frozen in place in surprise. "You are associated with Mars, but that association must be Ereshkigal's as well. In fact, it must come from her. After all, her sister is Ishtar, sometimes called Inanna, who holds sway over Venus. It would make more sense for her sister and rival to be associated with with Mars, yes?"

Nergal sat down, he was clearly filled with rage, but he was deflating. "You speak no lies."

"So you searched countless Marses, allowing Moriarty the power to explore a new London, and giving you a hub to work from. You even brought in other detectives, like Herlock

Sholmes, and tried to lure us into the case without telling us your problem."

"Why would he do that?"

Sang Mi answered before Holmes did. "His pride. He didn't want to be shown to have screwed up. If you don't communicate the problem, it isn't real because it isn't spoken."

Nergal hurled his mace against a cage, knocking it over and causing the light in it to flit around against its bars. "If I did not believe you I would kill you where you stand."

We waited for his rage to cool. Sang Mi looked at me with some worry as he kicked and thrashed, knocking about the cages which I began to suspect contained nothing less than human souls. Finally, he let out a great cry, and became something close enough to calm.

"Alright then, Sherlock Holmes. Where is my wife?"

His wry smile grew, "Let me ask you a question first. Our world, our London, it was the location that Moriarty asked to travel to, correct?"

Nergal nodded, but I wondered if his patience would continue to hold.

"She has been right under your nose this whole time!"

Nergal's eyes and my own travelled to Sang Mi.

"What? NO! No I am not into Nergal, I am not into Jae Hyun, I am not--no!"

Holmes coughed into his fist. "...No, not Sang Mi. Rather, Moriarty knew this entire time where she was. He was stringing Nergal along until the moment he no longer needed his help."

The god's eyes went wide. "...I have been tricked."

\* \* \*

Nergal flew into a rage, and we quickly departed. Once we had exited Kur, the three of us stood in that strange hallway of doors to other worlds, catching our breath as though we had just run.

"...I get it now. The myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal has a few versions, right?" Sang Mi said.

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Holmes nodded. "And what is true in all of them?"

"They all have a contest of wits between Nergal and Ereshkigal, but in none of them does Nergal win with wits. He either loses and Ereshkigal makes him become her husband, or after losing he threatens to kill her and she agrees to marry him in exchange for her life."

Holmes nodded. "Correct, Miss Jhe. Moriarty did not simply find Nergal, he targeted him. Perhaps even showed Ereshkigal herself a way out."

"Why though?" I asked. "What game is he playing?"

"I may have misled our associate Nergal there into thinking that I was the foe that Moriarty wished to best. The actual solution is Elementary my dear doctor: to paraphrase Milton, better to rule in Kur than serve in heaven?"

\* \* \*

I had many questions for Holmes as we returned to Baker Street: were there other gods, other pantheons? What of the god I worshipped each Sunday? Holmes merely answered curtly, "We know nothing other that there is one world where those gods are real, just as there is a world where Sang Mi has fallen for the young Jae Hyun."

"--Which is extremely unlikely!" she cut in.

"Entirely my point," he replied warmly. "We can only know what we find evidence for in the places it applies to. Nothing more. Regardless, it is time to gather our allies. One in particular will prove invaluable in settling this matter."

After we had rallied those allies as Holmes wished, an affair not worth recounting in detail, we assembled a sort of council at Baker Street. Miss Jhe continued to refer to it as "The Fellowship of the Rifts" something which amused her to no end for reason I could understand, but Holmes seemed to accept this name, perhaps simply to amuse the girl. Gathered in the room were: ourselves, Sang Mi, Captain Shadow, Agatha and Orotoro (whom we had had a small adventure retrieving from where they had left to, but one which has no bearing on

any of the following events, aside from Agatha acquiring a new hat), as well as Herlock Sholmes and Dr Wilson (who made sure to complain about the inferiority of our apartment at every occasion they could muster). Mrs Hudson did an excellent job of bringing tea to everyone, and somehow had found an appropriate snack for Orotoro, perhaps having hoped he would return again.

“Excellent, now that we are all here, allow me to explain our predicament.” Holmes went through our recent adventures, and detailed our meeting with Nergal and the implications of it.

“So what is it you need all of us to do?” Herlock asked.

“Moriarty has no doubt been planning his own final gambit, one which we must interrupt, implementing our own before he can adjust.”

“I don’t quite understand why I’m needed ‘ere mister Holmes,” Agatha said. “I presume it’s just ‘cause you needed Orotoro...”

He cast his gaze up on her with a superb confidence, “My dear Miss Banksley, you will be the lynchpin of this whole operation.”

“So where is this Queen of Kur, Ereshkigal, anyway?” Captain Shadow asked.

“As I said, she has been under our noses. But I have exactly what we need to draw her out.”

\* \* \*

The Emerald Eyes Music Hall was not the most reputable of establishments, but it was a profitable one. I had been made aware of it before on a previous case, and of course even been there recently during an investigation into Moriarty’s activities. But I did not expect to be going there again, let alone with such a colourful cast of characters.

Orotoro was nervous to walk around so openly, but upon our reassurance, he became something of the centrepiece of a parade, with Holmes and his cane leading this strange circus.

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We reached the music hall, and each of our entourage did their best to sell the bull to the crowd, with Miss Jhe (against her wishes) standing on a soapbox acting as the main barker.

“Yes, you too can meet Gugalanna, the Bull of Heaven! The legendary golden beast—it's not a trick ladies and gentleman and others—not that you probably hear the third one said much in the 1890's? Anyway—look! It's a bull! It's golden! Gugalanna! That's a name!”

Both Holmes and Sholmes were looking with Eagle eyes at the windows of the music hall. Most faces had a look of interest, confusion, or wonder. But one had a very different expression: one woman thrust her head out the window with a look of utmost concern and worry—as though the police had finally found her hideout. In unison, Holmes and Sholmes pointed, and her face soured, and removed itself from the window.

“But what if she runs?” I asked.

“She won't, for the same reasons Nergal didn't attack us.”

I frowned, “Your careful planning?”

“Unfortunately not, though I wish I could take credit for it. No, I realised fairly quickly I could count on one thing with these timeless beings.”

“And that is?”

“More than anything, they're bored. She'll want to see why we came.”

We entered into the music hall, Orotoro hunching down to get through the doors, and we were ushered into a parlour by some of the staff where a young and beautiful woman with hair as rich and dark as the night sky, and skin of light brown. Her eyes seemed to shine as though stars were buried deep inside them. She wore a cheerful yellow dress, and many silver accessories.

“So, what exactly is your deal then?” she said, tapping a finger on the table.

Holmes gave a deep bow. “If you wouldn't mind me skipping through our pretences, it is an honour to meet you, Ereshkigal, Queen of Kor.”

She was startled, but settled very quickly. “I see the jig is up. Did Nergal send you?” She let out a long sigh that sounded like the wind itself had become tired.

“We have just recently visited with him,” Holmes said.

“Well, I’m not going back,” she said.

“Right now, our world is having quite a few issues related to your absence.”

Agatha frowned, and Holmes turned to her, “You have something to add, Miss Banksley?”

“...Well I heard your story about her, and if that’s even half true, I don’t think it’s right to send her back to him. I understand that was a long time ago and all, but I don’t think being threatened into marriage is alright.”

Ereshkigal nodded, “Yes, listen to her! And he couldn’t even stay faithful. How many other goddesses did he marry? And he just kept coming back so he wouldn’t lose his boons of power... I mean when we started I was sort of into the whole strong bad-boy thing but it turned out he was just a slimy jerk.”

Sang Mi chimed in, “You deserve better than that, there’s no reason you should have to put up with a cheater!”

Agatha crossed her arms and nodded. “Or a man who threatens you or hits ya!”

Shadow moved over to this growing faction. “And every person deserves the chance to live in freedom without feeling bound by obligations they cannot escape.”

I was moved to concur as well, “Yes Holmes, I know that there are terrible things going on, but it doesn’t feel right to send a woman back to a terrible husband, goddess or not!” Orotoro’s big head bobbed in agreement with me, and Sholmes and Wilson even joined the accord.

Holmes looked pleased.

Ereshkigal looked between the group. “...You’re right. I was just hiding out here, but why should I let him have Kur? That’s my kingdom.”

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There was a chorus of affirmation for her standing up for herself, which was only broken by the echoing sound of a single man clapping.

"Fantastic, absolutely fantastic. You know, somehow I didn't see this eventuality coming until it was too late, but I see I've underestimated you," from among the music hall staff who had led us in, a man pulled off his disguise, revealing a familiar older man: The Napoleon of Crime, James Moriarty himself.

Holmes held a hand out, signalling for us to stay back, and stepped towards his foe.

"Moriarty. It's strange seeing you so alive."

"I could say the same. And as quick as your reputation, it seems you've figured out my plan."

Holmes' gaze was unwavering. "I knew you were a proud man, but I never took you for the hubris of replacing a god."

He merely shrugged. "Frankly I'm saddened to see that you were not bothered as much by losing the challenge of me as I was of you."

"And yet what would you have done when you reached the peak of yet another mountain? These gods seem miserable in their own ways, always struggling to relieve their itch of boredom. For a man who claims that this was his great burden, you seem keen to take it on again."

Moriarty's face was grim. "Do you suggest I die?"

"Nothing of the sort. Though I am prepared for you to do so. You have already died here once, we set a precedent so to speak. But may I suggest, this has no need to be your last battlefield?"

Moriarty narrowed his hawk-like eyes. "You're saying I simply leave?"

"I am saying that you have gained knowledge that the cosmology of existence is far bigger than you ever imagined it to be. I offered Miss Banksley over there a similar deal, despite her own crimes. You have yet to find satisfaction in your pursuits. Perhaps you can try something else, somewhere else."



Inside that head was a mind that had once calculated the movements of objects in space with a precision that had astounded scientists around the world, and now through the veil of his eyes, I could see the human abacus's beads moving back and forth, counting and calculating. Finally, with a grimace, he nodded. "In another life, I would have considered the risk of winning here worth it."

"It is the wise man who knows when to fight another day."

"Or the foolish man who wishes to face Nergal on his own. Farewell again, Sherlock Holmes. I doubt these versions of us will meet again."

"We won't. But I do get the last laugh."

Moriarty had already begun to leave, but turned his head slightly to hear what Holmes meant by it.

"After all, you're very wrong that I'll be facing Nergal on my own."

Moriarty didn't reply, just turned his head back and disappeared from our sight, and our lives. Presumably he stepped through a crack in the world, and went somewhere else. I'd like to imagine he learned something of enjoying the world beyond his infernal machinations, but I am also too much a realist to entertain the idea particularly strongly.

Holmes spun around, positively giddy. "You did amazing, Agatha. Just what I hoped you'd bring to this affair."

She looked around. "...I don't know what you mean, but I suppose you're welcome?"

He bowed again. "Now then, divine Ereshkigal, if you would give us the honour, we will help you, if you will help us."

She sighed again. "I was enjoying just being a singer here, but I suppose you're right. It's time."

The windows to the building were suddenly darkened, as though an eclipse had come. People ran in from the streets for shelter, and soon we ran out to see what they were screaming about--the sky had indeed gone black, when moments before it had been a sunny blue sky. The stars that should have been scattered across it had formed the shape of a man, his voice booming down into minds.

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"ERESHKIGAL. IT IS TIME TO RETURN HOME TO ME."

She stepped forward, and with every step she shed some part of her human form. She was robed in a cloak of funeral flowers, a crown of iron on her head whose prongs reached up a full foot above her brow. In her hand was a fearsome spear, whose tip seemed to cut the air leaving a line of darkness and stars behind it.

"NERGAL!" She screamed at the sky. "I. WANT. A. DIVORCE!" She grew, both in size, and in abstraction, till she too was a being of stars in the night sky. The two titans of light and shadow began to fight: his lion mace against her spear--or at least what I assumed were them, as now they were as constellations, but weaving and moving through the firmament above us.

"You can do it, miss!" Agatha yelled.

"Beat the snot out of the cheating bastard!" Sang Mi yelled.

"Cast off your chains, win your freedom!" Shadow yelled.

"Yes, I too hope you win! Fight hard!" I found myself crying out.

"Stop him from taking an unfair portion of your powers and possessions!" Herlock said, a little out of the mood we'd been building.

It was barely a whisper, but I could swear I heard Sherlock say a single word as he stared at the sky: "Win."

The Lion-Mace and the Spear clashed, the sound rippling across London like a siren. Soon my comrades were calling on the other passersby to cheer for Ereshkigal. Most did not understand, but as it seemed to be the popular thing to do, the cries grew and spread. Orotoro carried Agatha as she called it out, and Shadow seemed to be using some piece of technology or magic that amplified her own voice.

But soon more voices than I could count were calling up. And as they did so, it seemed that Ereshkigal became stronger--then with a blow like thunder, the spear went through the starry chest of her foe.

And just as suddenly, there was no world.

We stood in a stark and empty whiteness, where Ereshkigal stood, bloody spear in hand, her crown somehow more regal than it had ever been before. Her cape of flowers caused the white nothingness to sprout blossoms as it dragged along it. Nergal lay before her, eyes fearful, clutching the wound on his side.

She held a hand out, and he clicked his tongue, and with some pain, held his own out. Something passed between them, like raw power and authority, and I felt myself dropping to my knees.

"Hail the Queen of Kur," I said, in unison with my comrades, without realising the words had been about to pass my lips.

She nodded to us. "You have done me a great service, in return, I shall heal the wounds of your world. If you pass through the gates of Kur, know that there will be an honoured spot for each of you. Farewell."

The white grew stronger, brighter, and then there was nothing. Suddenly, with a gasp, I found myself in 221B Baker Street. Holmes was there in his own chair, and... surrounding us were our comrades in this whole endeavour. I touched my face, as though to see if I was still real.

That was when the door opened, and Mrs. Hudson entered in, and dropped her tea tray as she cried out.

"Mr Holmes! This is too much, far too much! I have permitted many things--too many things, but bringing a bull into your apartment is too much!"

It took us some time to calm her down, but the reality soon became apparent, as we went out and asked several passersby about the events of the last few weeks.

For the rest of London, it was as though no such events had occurred. Though for those who had touched a rift, they remembered. Whether those memories were a blessing or a burden is not for me to say. Neither did those who died return from death, but the reasons for their deaths were all remembered now as normal things, if sometimes grizzly.

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We sat there together, piecing this together in our heads, when Sang Mi spoke what all of us were thinking but afraid to say: "...So Ereshkigal put the whole world back the way it was supposed to be, but forgot to send us all home?!?"

As if on cue, another knock appeared at the door, and it was opened to once again reveal Mycroft, who congratulated us on fixing the problem so completely, and then had another revelation.

"We've used the vast resources of the British Government to get in contact with the authorities."

"Aren't you the authorities?" Agatha asked.

"The authorities of existence."

"Ah."

Following him in were a pair of women, both in garish clothing.

"Hello there, I'm Lady Aesculapius of the Firmament! You all knew I was going to make an appearance before this whole thing finished up right?"

"I have no idea who you are, madam," I said.

She deflated. "Oh. Well, that's disappointing."

The other woman coughed to bring attention to herself, "And I'm Jesslyn Swift, of OOPS, that's not a mistake the organisation is called OOPS."

Lady Aesculapius dragged the spotlight back on herself, "AND! We're here to take everyone back to your proper place-or wherever you want to go. I even brought my girlfriend Blanche to help with your luggage!"

A voice from outside the room who was clearly done with this whole scenario called back, "Don't bring me into this Aesc."

She smiled back at us. "So let's get this sorted, say your goodbyes, and we'll all be off."

We said our farewells. The principled Shadow, the brave Agatha and Orotoro, the clever Sang Mi, and... well Herlock and Wilson were also here, I suppose.

Tears were shed, and many handshakes and embraces given. I shan't recount it all, but even I found my eyes watering. It had been a strange time, but one which I would never forget.

"Oh right--one last thing," Miss Jhe said. "There is this guy named Arthur Conan-Doyle, yeah?"

"Right, he edits my works and helps get them published."

"He's going to claim he wrote all of them someday, that you weren't real."

I laughed. "That's preposterous. Of course we're real, I mean, I'm as real as you are."

She smiled back. "Well, I'll remember that. Thanks for everything." She pressed something into my palm--it was a coin with a foreign symbol on it, presumably from her home. I was going to protest--after all time had been finally set right after so much work, but she had hustled out of the room before I could. I have kept that as a token of those days--and on many long nights it has become my great comfort. I can clutch it close, and remember that I am not mad. These things did happen.

Holmes ceased to speak on the matter after a few months. I knew he still remembered, but the details of these cases proved... troublesome to his work on cases that were not so focused on the cosmology of existence. And so I have been left alone with my memories, and this small token of it all.

I doubt that these manuscripts will be published, if I were my own publisher, I doubt I would even consider them. But I needed to put these words down, as proof I was real. As proof that I really did meet so many strange and wondrous beings and have such wild adventures. No one will ever believe me.

But if, perhaps, you find these words someday long after I have reached my grave, I hope you too can look to the sky and know that there are things beyond our understanding waiting to bring wonders to us.

Yours sincerely,

Doctor John Watson

# The Cosmology of Sherlock Holmes

This book would not have been possible without the generous help of the brilliant people who helped us edit and transcribe these lost stories to be released:

1. The Adventure of the Empty Heart – by James Wylder
2. The Adventure of the Piscine Pranksters – by Lupan Evezan
3. Sherlock Versus Herlock – by Callum Phillipott
4. The Hole in Things – by Sean Dillon
5. The Adventure of the Stellar Sailing Ship – by Christa Mactire
6. Dark Dealings – by Callum Phillipott
7. The Adventure of the Golden Bull – by Aristide Twain
8. The Adventure on the Red Rock – by Dillon O’Hara
9. The Adventure of Time and Place – by Nicks Walker, with thanks to J. Cobwebb
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**PREVIEW: Academy 27**

**~The Great Novelist~**

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## The Great Novelist

### Academy 27, City of Takumi, Planet Gongen

It was a Tuesday when Jhe Sang Mi, more often called Kalingkata, walked into her home classroom after school to grab her hat which she has once again forgotten, only to find her friend Li Xiu hacking away at a keyboard. She had a glass screw top bottle she was taking swigs from at regular intervals; it smelled clearly of apple juice. She was, notably, wearing a beret along with her school uniform. Kalingkata had never seen her friend in a beret before, but had seen her get extremely caught up in things, and so after grabbing her own hat sat down on another desk and watched her performance. After a little longer than you'd think, Li Xiu turned her head slowly, and then scrambled to try to look normal, taking her hat off, and stuffing it and the bottle in her bag, before just as suddenly changing her mind and replacing both where they were, swinging around to cross her legs and lean back with her arms crossed as she faced Kalingkata, a motion that would have been much more effective had Sang Mi not been sitting there literally the entire time.

“Oh, I didn't see you there Sang Mi, how is it going? Do you need something from me?”

“Yeah,” Sang Mi answered. “What?”

“What?”

She gestured at the scenario before her, “Yeah, what?”

Li Xiu frowned, before getting herself together. “Well, after some deliberation, I decided that maybe before I become a famous director—”

“Uh huh, yeah.”

“I should slum it a little and become a world famous writer! Write the great Gongen Novel, you know?”

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Sang Mi blinked a few times. “So, disregarding that you just called writing a novel ‘slumming’ which is an entirely separate conversation we’re going to have later surrounded by your closest friends and family, do you... really think that you can just drop into writing a novel and have it be immediately brilliant?”

“Yes,” she answered with a clean simplicity that Kalingkata just kinda had to accept.

“Okay, yeah, sure. Good on you then. Um... what’s it about?”

Li Xiu pushed on the bridge of her nose as though there were glasses there to push up. There were not. “Alright, so get this. So, you make a good point—I am jumping right in, so in my brilliance I realized that for my first book I should use some public domain characters.”

“Oh,” Sang Mi said nodding. “Like Batman, or Naruto, or Jenny Over-There?”

“Yes, but better. See, I’m using the world’s greatest detective!”

“Poirot?”

“Sherlock Holmes!!! And Watson! Only get this, I’m modernizing it.”

Sang Mi kicked her feet back and forth. “Wasn’t there a version of that that did that a while back?”

“Yes yes, we all know about BBC Sherlock—”

“No I meant that one that was set in 2350’s Londonplex on Earth? The one where Watson was a robot, and Moriarty was a Maverick Crime Lord trying to make an inroad on Earth? They had a pet dog with a jetpack name Ruffles?”

Li Xiu slumped. “Oh. Yeah. Did you uh... like that version?”

“Not really.”

She perked up again. “Yes! It sucked! Which is where mine is going to succeed!”

“By not sucking?”

“Exactly! It’s so simple I can’t believe no one else thought of it!”

At this point, Kalingkata had realized that this was going to be her evening entertainment, and reached into her bag, pulling out a bag of shrimp-chips, a chocolate bar, and a bottle of cola. “Yes, brilliant, please continue.”

Li Xiu placed her hand on her breast bone, and raised her chin up. “Right, so as I was saying, in my wisdom I have a much better way of going about all this. I’m going to set it in Victorian London—but get this—its going to be modern! There will be tears in reality where like... thingies come through!”

She munched on a handful of shrimp chips, offering some to Li Xiu who refused. “Elaborate on that?”

“No. So they’re going to meet all sorts of things—like uh, a young Gongen girl will come through a portal and confront Moriarty!”

Sang Mi’s chewing slowed down considerably to a halt. “...Sorry what did you say?”

“A cute Gongen girl! So it's relatable to the average reader in 2387, so no reason not to set it in the past or anything.”

Nodding slowly, Sang Mi set the chips down. “...And what happens to this girl?”

“Well she gets caught by the police, and so Scotland Yard calls in Holmes and Watson to investigate, because her clothes are out of place, and she still has her phone on her which they don’t understand and they think is some sort of black mirror. But she proves that she’s really from our present because Holmes is smart and sees there is no way she’s faking this. But they can’t keep her in her clothes from the present, they have to get her into past historical clothes... this was actually the hardest part of the story. I had to do so much research, and I probably made that whole segment longer than it needed to be because I didn’t want to feel like I’d wasted my time, but they bring in a dressmaker to modify some clothes for her—you see Harrods had burned down at that time and was being rebuilt, and I tried to find other department stores but—oh never mind that isn’t important! Look, so she gets a scene of getting

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to wear a cool Victorian dress, and then we move to the climax!”

Kalingkata was no longer having a good time. She looked Li Xiu up and down, face getting more and more serious. “How... do you know all that?”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“How did you know all of that happened?”

Li Xiu laughed, “You’re such a jokester Sang Mi! I made all that up! I did use your name as a placeholder though—maybe I’ll keep it.”

“Yeah, you do that.” Sang Mi put her snacks away, and hoisted her bag over her shoulder. “Good luck with the novel, Li Xiu.”

“Well, it’s more like a short story collection, but thanks. Are you still on for Roleplaying Game night this weekend?”

Sang Mi nodded. “Yeah, I’ve got a whole thing planned out. Um... Yeah I’ll see you later.” She walked out of the classroom, her eyes glued to her shoes. She’d assumed that had all been a dream...

“Hey,” turning, she saw Saki there, leaning against the wall, looking just as cool as Li Xiu wished she did. “There’s another wave coming through this weekend. We’re going to be seeing what happens.”

Sang Mi nodded. “...I think more has been happening than I thought.”

Saki grinned. “Having trouble telling your dreams from reality these days?”

Sang Mi began walking away, trying to keep her head straight. “Something like that.”

“And what are you going to do about it? These strange dreams?”

At first, Sang Mi was going to ignore her, or make a rude hand gesture. But as it hit her, a smirk hit her face, and she turned, pulling her cap on. “Oh, you should know that by now. The answer, my dear Saki, is Elementary.”

“...That doesn’t actually solve the problem,” Saki preened.

Then she gave the rude hand gesture.

Watson

### **About the Editor**

James Wylder is a writer living in Elkhart Indiana who is known for creating 10,000 Dawns, and writing for the WARSONG series as well as the Doctor Who spin offs such as Cwej. James also was the host and writer of the “Tales by the Blue Light” live show in Elgin Illinois for two years.

A big fan of cooking, dogs, RPG's and gaming in general, James hopes you've enjoyed spending time in the worlds they've made as much as they've enjoyed creating them.

You can support their work at [patreon.com/jameswylder](https://patreon.com/jameswylder)

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