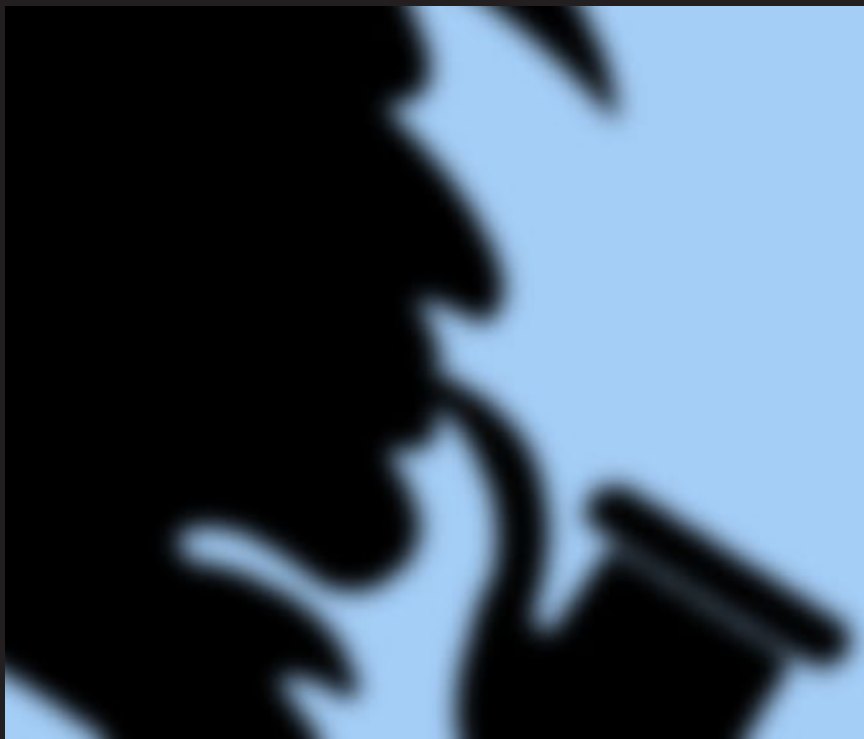


The Three Investigators

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The Case of the Fourth Investigator



Mark Zahn

The Three Investigators in

The Case of the

Fourth

Investigator

by Mark Zahn

Based on characters created by Robert Arthur

Presented by: www.threeinvestigatorsbooks.com

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I WAS STANDING IN THE KITCHEN of my aunt and uncle's house nibbling on one of my Aunt Mathilda's famous chocolate chip cookies, when I heard two honks of a car horn in quick succession coming from the front drive.

As I had been battling the effects of a particularly bad cold for the last three days, I grabbed several fresh handkerchiefs and cough drops as I ambled out the door.

Worthington gave two more jaunty honks of the car horn as he saw me emerge from the house.

Worthington, for those of you who don't know, is my chauffeur. Well, not exactly my chauffeur. He works for the Rent 'N Ride Auto Rental Company. I won the use of a gold plated Rolls Royce in a contest some time back. Worthington came with the car. He's a tall, lanky gentleman from Britain – and a good friend. As the founder and First Investigator of The Three Investigators, I can honestly say that Worthington has been essential to the success of the firm. He takes a great interest in all of our cases, and has helped us out more times than I can count. In fact, we often refer to him as our unofficial 'fourth investigator.'

As it was a Saturday it was Worthington's day off, so he was behind the wheel of his own Ford sedan rather than the Rolls. He was also dressed in a smart navy blazer and grey turtleneck rather than his usual chauffeur's uniform.

"Good morning, Master Jupiter," Worthington said warmly.

"Good morning," I mumbled, sounding just as miserable as I felt. "And Worthington – it's Saturday – you can just call me Jupe."

Worthington chuckled. "Very good, Master, er, Jupiter. I quite forgot. Old habits die hard as they say. Are you ready to depart?"

"Ready," I said weakly, dabbing at my nose.

“Splendid! Off we go then!”

Earlier that morning, Worthington had called me at home with some exciting news. While perusing The Rocky Beach Herald, our local newspaper, he had come across a small announcement buried in the pages of the classifieds. Apparently someone was claiming to have unearthed a lost manuscript by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the legendary author and creator of the master detective: Sherlock Holmes. This person claimed to have found the yellowed pages in the rafters of an old bed and breakfast where Conan Doyle was known to have stayed while visiting America in 1928. The building was undergoing an extensive renovation when the pages were discovered.

The man who found the pages was planning on auctioning them off to the highest bidder. Obviously this is a find of a lifetime and worth seeing, even if one can't afford to buy them. This is especially true for Worthington and me, as we are members of The Six Napoleons. The Six Napoleons is a Sherlockian Society located in Rocky Beach. We started out as six members, but have since grown to over a dozen. We hold bi-monthly meetings at each member's home and discuss the cases of Conan Doyle's detective and his stalwart biographer, Dr. Watson.

I've tried to get my partners to join in, but Pete Crenshaw, the firm's Second Investigator, is more interested in reading the sports pages, or leafing through an issue of *Sports Illustrated* than reading Sherlock Holmes. And Bob Andrews, the Records and Research man of our team has an interest but he usually finds himself too busy with his part-time job at the library, or with his own hobby of photography, to give the subject his full attention.

The auction was to take place at the very bed and breakfast where the pages were found, located in nearby Seaside. The town

of Seaside is about twenty miles from Rocky Beach along the Pacific Coast Highway. Like Rocky Beach, it boasts magnificent views of the ocean. It's easy to see why Arthur Conan Doyle would want to stay there while visiting.

"It seems strange," Worthington remarked, "that there is very little publicity over the whole affair. I quite expected this to be national news. Instead, the only print it receives is a small ad in the classified section of a local newspaper – presumably paid for by the man himself."

I nodded my head and gazed morosely out the window. My throat hurt too bad to respond.

"Here we are," Worthington exclaimed. "Ah – I see that Keating and Held are here already!" Keating and Held are two of the founding members of The Six Napoleons. Worthington had excitedly called each and every member that morning. But only the four of us were able to attend.

The tall chauffeur bounded from the car. "An unread Holmes story awaits us inside!"

I shuffled along after him, wishing I were at home in bed with a hot bowl of chicken noodle soup. Keating and Held waved to us as we entered the large social room of the bed and breakfast. They had saved us two seats in the front row. An excited aura permeated the room, as fellow Sherlockians and curiosity seekers waited for the big unveiling.

I sat in my chair, coughed into my handkerchief, and then blew my nose; feeling rather drowsy from the cough syrup I had taken before leaving home.

Suddenly, the lights dimmed and the crowd became hushed. A tall man in a crisp tweed suit stepped up to the podium. He had a narrow, hawkish nose, piercing black eyes, and a slight receding

hairline that made him look very much like Sherlock Holmes himself! The man smiled grandly at the audience and cleared his throat.

“Good morning, one and all!” he said in a distinctly British accent. “I am Sebastian Moran, a friend of John Nilsson, the curator of the Seaside Squires Bed and Breakfast – the fine establishment in which you now sit. Mr. Nilsson had a family emergency and, unfortunately, cannot join us here today. He has asked me to preside over today’s sale – a task for which, I must admit, I am distinctly qualified.”

There was some more murmuring that rippled throughout the small congregation. Moran held up a white, spindly hand for quiet.

“For those who question my credentials, let me say that I am a thirty year member of The Norwood Builders – a Sherlockian Society based out of Santa Barbara. I have taught English Literature classes at Ruxton University, specializing in Holmesian lore; and have personally advised Sotheby’s of London on the sale of two Conan Doyle manuscripts.”

There was a smattering of polite applause, to which Moran smiled graciously. He held up his pale white hand once more and waited for quiet.

“The pages before me were found by Mr. Nilsson while his bed and breakfast was undergoing extensive renovation this past summer. As you know, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made Seaside Squires his residence for two weeks in the Fall of 1928 while attending a conference on spirituality and the after- life.

“The thirteen pages in question were found neatly folded inside an envelope and carefully placed within an opening in the rafters of the ceiling – all but invisible when standing on the floor.

It seems evident that the author went to great lengths to achieve this hiding place. For what purpose we will never know. Perhaps as a joke or perhaps as a way of thanking the inn for a restful stay. Whatever his motive, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has provided us with an extraordinary gift.

“The paper on which the story was penned has been examined by scientists at Ruxton and proclaimed authentic. The handwriting has been examined by experts and proven without question to be that of Conan Doyle’s. The story itself is a marvelous tale of suspense and intrigue, titled: *The Adventure of the Rival Poet*. It has been carefully preserved in the glass case to my left. At this time I encourage all of you to step forward and examine the pages. Please no flash photography. Bidding will begin in ten minutes!”

The audience immediately stood up from their seats and began filing toward the glass display case. I groaned as Worthington grabbed me by the arm and eagerly pulled me up toward the podium. There was much jostling as Sherlockians gathered close to see the priceless pages.

Worthington, Keating, Held and I stood in line waiting our turn. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, we had our chance to examine the extraordinary pages. The first page of the manuscript started thusly:

Upon consulting my weathered files, I find it recorded that it was near the end of May, 1892 in which the following affair transpired. Our housekeeper had admitted a heavyset man with ruddy features and thinning hair, worn in a comb-over style. He entered our quarters rather tentatively, twisting a shapeless cap in his hands in great agitation.

Sherlock Holmes eyed the red-faced man curiously, scanning him from the top of his sparsely haired head to the laces of his muddy boots with those keen, eagle eyes that seem to see everything at once.

After a brief pause, my friend fired his pipe and smiled at our visitor.

'I see that you have recently returned from a trip to Sri Lanka. Pray tell, how was the climate? Is not early spring a rather wet period in their tropical year? A strange time to visit I should think.'

Naturally the man was aghast – as most who witness this amazing feat are. His face, which was red to begin with, became even more flushed. After closing his gaping mouth, he managed to stammer out a few words.

'Mr. Holmes – great are your powers, such as I have heard. But this... this is something else. Otherworldly I should say! How you managed to divine my journey, short of mind reading, I will never know!'

Holmes offered me a casual glance and chuckled – as if what was clear to his eyes must surely be obvious to me as well.

'Really, Holmes! This is too much!' I shouted.

'Even I, who have witnessed this miracle time and again, am left wondering how you can conceive of such incredible answers!'

Holmes simply shrugged indifferently and exhaled a veil of blue smoke from his burning clay pipe. 'The answer is elementary my dear Watson. Once I explain, you shall see that even the common laborer off the street should arrive at the very same conclusion.'

'Then go on,' I cried. 'For this lesson is surely one I shall not forget!'

After reading through the first page, Worthington sighed and turned to face me, a look of consternation upon his face.

“Shall I summon the authorities, Master Jones, or would you like to use your official capacity as a junior deputy of the Rocky Beach Police Department to unveil this forgery?”

I blew my nose and gave Worthington a quizzical glance. The combination of the cold and the medicine I had taken left me feeling somewhat dazed. I wasn’t sure if I had heard him correctly.

“Pardon me, did you say this was a forgery?”

“Indeed I did, Master Jones. I assumed upon reading Mr. Moran’s bogus document that you arrived at the same conclusion. But we must act quickly – for he is about to start the bidding!”

What did Worthington see that I didn’t?

Turn to the next page for the answer!

SOLUTION

There were several clues within the first page of Sebastian Moran's 'lost manuscript' that left no doubt it was a clever forgery.

The first clue was the use of the word 'comb-over.' The word comb-over is a relatively new way of describing a hairstyle preferred by men with thinning hair in which long strands of hair are literally combed over the top of the balding scalp. This word wasn't introduced into English language dictionaries until 2003.

The second error Worthington noticed was when Holmes referred to the island nation as 'Sri Lanka.' If this story was really written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1928, it would be impossible for him to use the name Sri Lanka since it was known as 'Ceylon' up until 1972 when it changed its name!

The third clue simply served to make Worthington suspicious, and therefore caused him to carefully re-read the document. As any Sherlockian worth his salt will tell you, not once in all the adventures penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did the author ever have Holmes utter the phrase: "*Elementary, my dear Watson!*" This is a common misperception many people have regarding the great detective. While it is not out of the realm of possibility that Conan Doyle *could* have had Holmes use this phrase in his lost story, it seems unlikely and proved to be the catalyst in raising Worthington's doubt in regard to the manuscript's authenticity.

As a result, Sebastian Moran (real name: Clyde Dewey) was unmasked as a notorious con-man who had been working the California coast for some time, bilking unsuspecting tourists out of their money. When he was grilled by the police, Dewey admitted that he had stayed at the Seaside Squires Bed & Breakfast a

few months prior to his scam. Upon scavenging through the owner's possessions looking for things to steal, he happened upon a sheaf of papers that looked quite old. When Mr. Nilsson, the owner of the inn, related the story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle staying there back in 1928, and then announced that he would be leaving the inn empty in May as he took a month long trip across Europe, Dewey hatched his plan!

He used an old quill pen and inkwell to write his own Sherlock Holmes story, and then waited for Nilsson to leave so he could run his ad in the newspaper.

And he nearly got away with it, too!

I'll admit the answer went completely unnoticed by me, although my mental capacity was slightly hindered by my sickened condition. If it hadn't been for The Three Investigator's honorary Fourth Investigator, Dewey might have walked away with several thousands of dollars!

It seems odd for me to be the one writing about how the mystery was solved – but as Worthington said when he dropped me off at my house...

“The answer was elementary, my dear Jones!”