The Hound of the Baskervilles

Arthur Conan Doyle · 1902

A country doctor brings Sherlock Holmes an old manuscript, a newspaper cutting, and a question: what killed Sir Charles Baskerville on the yew alley of his own house, and what were the footprints found beside him? The new heir is coming from Canada to take up the estate on Dartmoor. Holmes cannot leave London, so he sends Watson — alone, into the fog, the mire, and the legend of the hound.

The novel is performed exactly as Doyle published it, every word, in fifteen chapters: Watson's narration, his two reports and his diary included. Nothing is cut or modernised.

LISTEN FOR

— The book changes hands as it goes: Watson tells the first seven chapters, then reads out his letters to Holmes, then his diary, then takes up the story again.

— Who knows what, and when: Holmes says in the last chapter that he was certain of the hound and had guessed the criminal before the train left Paddington, and he tells no one.

— The boots: a new brown one goes and comes back, an old black one goes and stays. Count how many times they are mentioned before anyone explains them.

— The cry on the moor is heard three times before anything is seen, and each time the man beside Watson gives it a different name.

THE PEOPLE, AS THE BOOK NAMES THEM

Dr. Watson	the narrator · Holmes's friend and chronicler
Sherlock Holmes	of Baker Street
Dr. James Mortimer	a dabbler in science
Sir Henry Baskerville	the last of the Baskervilles
Stapleton	the naturalist
Miss Stapleton	a young lady of attractions
Barrymore	the husband acting as butler
Mrs. Barrymore	the wife as housekeeper
Mr. Frankland	of Lafter Hall
Mrs. Laura Lyons	Frankland's daughter, who married an artist named Lyons
Lestrade	the best of the professionals
Cartwright	a lad of fourteen, with a bright, keen face
Perkins	Perkins the groom
John Clayton	I've driven my cab this seven years
Wilson	the manager of the messenger office

THE PLACES

Toronto · London · Exeter · Baskerville Hall · Costa Rica · York · Dartmoor

CHAPTERS, WITH THEIR TIMES IN THE VIDEO

0:00	Chapter 1. Mr. Sherlock Holmes
12:40	I covet your skull
14:37	Chapter 2. The Curse of the Baskervilles
36:45	Chapter 3. The Problem
54:47	Chapter 4. Sir Henry Baskerville
1:19:24	Chapter 5. Three Broken Threads
1:40:39	Chapter 6. Baskerville Hall
1:40:54	Parting injunctions
2:01:51	Chapter 7. The Stapletons of Merripit House
2:31:20	Chapter 8. First Report of Dr. Watson
2:47:00	Chapter 9. The Light upon the Moor
3:24:20	Chapter 10. Extract from the Diary of Dr. Watson
3:45:04	Chapter 11. The Man on the Tor
4:11:47	Chapter 12. Death on the Moor
4:41:26	Chapter 13. Fixing the Nets
5:01:58	Chapter 14. The Hound of the Baskervilles
5:26:49	Chapter 15. A Retrospection

WORDS AND THINGS, FROM THE MARGIN

Penang lawyer A walking stick cut from the stem of a dwarf palm, imported through Penang in the Straits Settlements (now Malaysia). The name is a joke: a cudgel that settled arguments.

The legend's source Dartmoor had its own tale of Richard Cabell of Brook Manor, Buckfastleigh, who died in 1677 and was said to be hunted by black hounds; his tomb at Buckfastleigh church is still caged. Doyle heard the moor legends from his friend Bertram Fletcher Robinson in 1901, and the book is dedicated to him.

Coroner's inquiry In England a sudden or unexplained death had to go before a coroner's inquest, where a jury of local men heard the evidence and returned a verdict such as natural causes, accident or murder by person unknown.

Yew alley Walks between clipped yew hedges were a feature of Tudor and Stuart gardens. Yew is slow-growing and long-lived, and every part of the tree except the red flesh of the berry is poisonous.

Bourgeois type Bourgeois, pronounced 'bur-joyce' by printers, was the trade name for a type size of about nine points; 'leaded' means set with thin strips of lead between the lines for extra space.

Entail A legal settlement by which a landed estate passed to a fixed line of heirs, so that the holder for the time being could neither sell it nor leave it away by will.

Grimpen Mire A fictional bog. Its model is generally taken to be Fox Tor Mires, a wide peat bog south of Princetown in which moor ponies and cattle have been lost.

Hut circles The stone footings of round houses, thousands of which survive on Dartmoor, singly and in walled settlements such as Grimspound. They are Bronze Age, roughly 1500 BC, rather than Neolithic as Stapleton says.

Typewriting business The Remington typewriter went on sale in 1874. By the late 1880s typewriting offices, often run by women, took in copying work from solicitors, authors and businesses, one of the first office trades open to women.

Scholastic agencies Scholastic agencies placed teachers in private schools and kept records of them; the best known, Gabbitas and Thring, was founded in London in 1873.

Kneller and Reynolds Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), German-born, was the leading portrait painter in England from Charles II to George I. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), born at Plympton in Devon, was the first President of the

Royal Academy.

Phosphorus White phosphorus glows pale green in the dark as it slowly oxidises in air; it is poisonous and was used in match-heads until the trade was banned in the early twentieth century.

PASSAGES TO HEAR AGAIN

"Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill."

Holmes in Chapter 1, with the stick in his hand and Mortimer's ring at the door.

"Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"

The last line of Chapter 2, dropped almost to a whisper; listen for what Holmes asks first.

"He was running, Watson—running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart—and fell dead upon his face."

Holmes on the evening of the first day, after a day alone with the map and the tobacco.

"Go back!" she said. "Go straight back to London, instantly."

Miss Stapleton's first words to Watson on the moor path, before her brother comes back with his net.

"It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson," said a well-known voice. "I really think that you will be more comfortable outside than in."

The end of Chapter 11, in the stone hut, with Watson's pistol cocked in his pocket.

"It is not what we know, but what we can prove. If we make one false move the villain may escape us yet."

Holmes beside the body on the rocks, when Watson asks why they do not seize Stapleton at once.

"Thus I had made certain of the hound, and had guessed at the criminal before ever we went to the west country."

The retrospection, by the fire in Baker Street: what Holmes says he knew from the smell of a letter.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Watson reads the stick and Holmes corrects him. List what each man gets right about Dr. Mortimer, then check both lists against what Mortimer says of himself when he comes in.
2. The manuscript of 1742 and the Devon County Chronicle are both read aloud in Chapter 2. What does each say killed its Baskerville, and what does Dr. Mortimer add that is in neither?
3. Holmes asks whether the marks were on the path or the grass, and on which side of the gate. Why does he want those two facts? Compare with what he says about the hound's path in Chapter 15.
4. The warning letter: what does Holmes read from the paper, the ink, the pen and the placing of the words? Which of those readings does the last chapter confirm?
5. Two boots are taken and one comes back. Keeping to the text, where is each boot last seen, and what does Holmes say in Chapter 15 about why the new one was no use?
6. Holmes sends Watson down with orders to report facts and leave the theorizing to him. In Chapters 8 and 9, where does Watson keep to this, and where does he not?
7. Barrymore is under suspicion for most of the book. Make a list, chapter by chapter, of everything that points at him, and of the explanation each item finally receives.
8. The cry on the moor is heard by Watson first with Stapleton, then with Sir Henry, then with Holmes. What does each companion say it is, and what does Watson say each time?
9. Miss Stapleton warns Watson, then Sir Henry, and in Chapter 15 Holmes says she tried 'again and again'. Which warnings are shown in the text, and what does each stop short of saying?

10. In the hut Holmes says he kept Watson in the dark ‘partly for your own sake’. What reasons does he give there, and what reasons does he give in Chapter 15? Are they the same?
11. Compare the two deaths on the moor, Sir Charles in the yew alley and Selden on the rocks. What does the text tell us each man saw, heard and did, and how do Holmes and Watson learn it?
12. ‘It is not what we know, but what we can prove.’ What does Holmes know by the night of Selden’s death, what does he still lack, and what finally supplies it?

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