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## **A Q&A WITH HARRISON KITTERIDGE, AUTHOR OF *SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE ADVENTURE OF THE PAPER JOURNAL***

### What was your impetus for writing the novel?

I was re-reading *The Mazarin Stone*, and something about the opening made me sad. Watson pops in to 221B for a visit one evening to find that Holmes has been running himself into the ground working on the case, and his page, Billy, is worried for his health. I didn't like thinking of Holmes being without Watson to look after him. It's like Bert with no Ernie. They say you should write stories you want to read, so I did, and wrote a story about Holmes and Watson choosing each other and staying together. Even in the Conan Doyle stories, it's clear that Holmes and Watson are the most important people in each other's lives, so, for me, it's not much of a stretch for them to be a couple.

### Why did you set the novel in a pseudo-dystopian future?

I'm not sure. The first part of the novel I wrote was actually just an unrelated free-writing exercise about a woman living in a dystopian future who was sequestered in her flat because she was running a fever. In this world, paper was no longer used and everyone's digital activity was stored on a central government database. The woman had, however, kept a series of paper journals all her life. Somehow, when I started thinking of writing a Sherlock Holmes adaptation, the two ideas merged. Once I realised how the technology would supplant Sherlock, the story really took hold.

### What is your favourite Arthur Conan Doyle Story and why?

*The Valley of Fear*. At the risk of being tarred, feathered and run out of town: it's the flashback – not the Sherlock Holmes investigation – that's my favourite part of the story. Birdie Edwards is one of my favourite literary characters (I would love to watch a film about his life).

### Why did you choose to re-tell some of Conan Doyle's stories instead of creating an entirely new history for Sherlock Holmes?

I'm not sure. I'm obviously a huge fan of Arthur Conan Doyle, and I think every fictional detective that has come after Sherlock Holmes owes him a great debt. I think maybe because the germinal idea for the story sprang from my melancholic reaction to re-reading *The Mazarin Stone* it was natural for me to remain rooted in the canon. In addition, I've always wondered exactly what happened between Sherlock Holmes and Mary Sutherland (the maid he gets engaged to in *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*). I never really found it plausible that she just shrugged him off and happily moved on to a new suitor. I've always wanted to know her side of the story. Somehow I got the idea that the woman in my future "dystopia" was Mary Sutherland and that her side of the story was written in her paper journal.

### Is Sherlock Holmes & the Adventure of the Paper Journal fanfiction?

Of course it is. Isn't every non-Conan Doyle story or adaptation (especially the pastiches) a work of fanfiction?

### Is fanfiction literature?

Some of it is, and some of it isn't. I think trying to classify a category as broad as fanfiction as definitively "literature" or "not literature" is silly and borders on making all the words used in the analysis meaningless.

### Will it insult you if people don't classify *Sherlock Holmes & the Adventure of the Paper Journal* as literature?

No. The term "literature" sets a very high bar. We can have a discussion about how the standard gets set, who gets to decide the metrics, and the biases and preconceptions that exclude writers from certain backgrounds or who write certain kinds of fiction, but there is a standard. It's a very subjective determination, and perhaps the best way to illustrate what I mean is to give an example of what I consider to be literature and why.

*"To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth."*

That is the first line of *Grapes of Wrath*. With no information about the story or the characters, we know immediately it is a story about hardship and survival. But we also know our heroes won't overcome – this is not a story about the plucky underdogs clawing their way up to success; it is about them holding on by their fingernails and trying to maintain their dignity. We know this because when the rains came "they did not cut the scarred earth" – it was all too little and too late. John Steinbeck tells us this in one line, in *the first* line. *That* is literature. That is the standard.

### What do you think about the *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon?

I haven't read the books, so I don't have an opinion on them. What I think *Fifty Shades* did was very neatly identify a gap in the market that traditional publishing was not serving. *Twilight* was aimed at tweens, but it attracted a large following among adult women who were drawn to the love story. There really weren't any books being written specifically for that demographic. *Fifty Shades* filled that void.

### When did you realise you shipped Johnlock?

Like most Sherlock Holmes fans, I knew the "are they or aren't they?" questions have been following Holmes and Watson almost since Arthur Conan Doyle created the characters, but I'd honestly never really thought about it much. Then after BBC's *Sherlock* became the juggernaut that it is, I stumbled on some fanfiction that was really entertaining and funny and moving. Soon after, I re-read *The Final*

*Problem* and *The Adventure of the Empty House*, and it was clear to me in a way that it wasn't before that Holmes and Watson are ride or die. In both cases, Watson places himself in potentially mortal danger with no thought for the widow he would be leaving behind. Holmes asked and that was all that mattered. They are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for each other – that's love. I don't necessarily need them to be in a romantic relationship (I find the strength of their platonic friendship quite moving), but I like them as a couple, and that was something Conan Doyle just couldn't explore. Even now, I think some writers feel that is something they have to shy away from if they want to appeal to a mainstream audience because the notion of Holmes and Watson in a homosexual relationship sets a certain kind of person's hair on fire.

### What other relationships/fandoms do you ship?

00Q (James Bond and Q). I found first stumbled upon 00Q in Bondlock (James Bond and Sherlock Holmes mash-ups), but I'm a lifelong James Bond fan, so I don't need the "Q is the mysterious third Holmes brother" trope to enjoy the stories.

### Any plans on writing a 00Q story?

There is an idea that keeps popping into my mind, but I can't tell if it's enough for an interesting story yet. James Bond is still under copyright, though, so I'd have to dress it up as something else if I do decide to write it.

### *Sherlock Holmes & the Adventure of the Paper Journal* is set in a world where participation in social media is government-mandated. What are your feelings on social media?

I think, given the tone of the novel, it is no surprise that I am deeply ambivalent about social media. It is incredibly useful and allows people to connect and share in ways that can be very empowering, but there is something suffocating about its ubiquity. And we can't burn our electronic documents the way we could embarrassing letters or journals. Everything anyone has ever done on the World Wide Web is saved somewhere, and none of us have any idea exactly where or how to get rid of any of it permanently. There is also something about the careful curation of our personal lives for consumption – the turning of everyone into a brand – that is disconcerting. Social networking is becoming more and more about self-marketing. If I didn't have books to flog, I wouldn't spend much time on social media (except Pinterest; Pinterest is amazing).

### Will there be more stories set in the universe of the novel?

Yes. I'm planning a series of short stories and another novel.

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