



For a sharper version of this image,
please visit the website of
"The Terror of Blue John Gap" Project
at www.acdsociety.com/bjg/a/bjga.html.

THE BEAST IN THE CAVE: A LOVECRAFTIAN CONAN DOYLE TALE

The letters of horror writer H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) reveal that he was an enthusiastic Sherlock Holmes fan as a boy, and in his long essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* he cites two Conan Doyle tales that strike "a powerfully spectral note," "The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'" and "Lot No. 249." Nothing in Lovecraft's writings indicates he read "The Terror of Blue John Gap," but had he done so, he surely would have been pleased given its affinities with his own weird fiction.

To start, there's the documentary format. The opening sentence of "The Terror of Blue John Gap" frames the narrative as the letter of a dead man, "found among the papers of Dr. James Hardcastle." Likewise, Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu," one of his most celebrated stories, is subtitled "(Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston)." Specific dates and carefully detailed settings lend verisimilitude in both tales. In his isolation and

doubts about his sanity, Hardcastle fits the mold of the doomed Lovecraftian hero.

Page 4 includes an ominous clue to the nature of the monster, the tufts of sheep's wool found outside the cavern, one of which is bloody. The sores on the anemic cows in Lovecraft's "The Dunwich Horror" similarly hint at the nature of that story's horror. Later in the same paragraph appear words and phrases — *fetid ... nameless thing ... lurking* — evocative of Lovecraft's prose. The preceding mention of "the old Roman arch" calls to mind the ancient Roman foundation of Exham Priory in Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls." A few pages later, Hardcastle remarks, "My own nostrils were filled by a low fetid odour, mephitic and abominable." Again, the language is strikingly Lovecraftian, and one of the characteristics of the Dunwich Horror is its "indescribable stench." ... (continued on other side)

A COMMON NEWSLETTER

— with a nod to Micah Clarke —

BRINGING TIDINGS FROM THE ACD SOCIETY

— a community dedicated to studying and enjoying the works of Arthur Conan Doyle —

via Ross Davies (editor pro tem, and publisher)

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*Shoscombe Prince in the winner's circle on January 5, after the first running of our Wessex Cup at Otto Penzler's The Mysterious Bookshop in New York City.
Photo by the justly proud owner, Derrick Belanger.*

EDITOR'S NOTES

On January 5 we presented nine Doylean Honors for outstanding recent work — to Jessie Amaolo, Shrabani Basu, Frank Cho, Margie Deck, Richard Fallon, Paul Hiscock, David MacGregor, David Marcum, and Brian McCuskey — and one for a lifetime of it — to Owen Dudley Edwards. Congratulations to all! We will be back at Otto's shop on January 11, 2024 for the 3rd annual Doylean Honors ceremony and 2nd running of our Wessex Cup. For the latest news, visit our website occasionally: acdsociety.com.

THE PAST

Belanger Books (belangerbooks.com) launched *Steel True, Blade Straight*, a new annual “Journal of Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,” with a book-signing in the Baker Street Irregulars’ merchants room on January 7 in New York City.

On January 18, Scott Monty of *I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere* (ihearofsherlock.com) reported that one of seven ACD-designed portable writing desks was for sale. As we go to press, it still is. The price: \$133,400 plus shipping.

In February, Paul Chapman and Mark Jones of *Doings of Doyle* (doingsofdoyle.com) focused on “A Literary Mosaic” — a fascinating fictional foreshadowing of *Through the Magic Door*.

In its Spring 2023 issue, *The University of Chicago Magazine* reminded us that Janet Flanner (as “Genet”) began her long career as *The New Yorker*’s Paris correspondent on October 10, 1925, with a letter that included this passage:

The second big event has been the lectures of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The French can't pronounce his name but they mutter something, buy a ticket, and rush into the Sociétés Savantes determined to see photographs of ghosts and to get ectoplasm poured all over them. The excitement is intense and gendarmes, they say, have been warned to remain cynical. To date the feeling seems to be that science, with the aid of Sir Arthur, is making great strides.

THE FUTURE

The Bimetallic Question of Montreal has been hosting a superb “All of Doyle” series of Zooms, with Edith Pouden in the chair. Interested? You should be! To learn more, feel free to email them at info@bimetallicquestion.org.



*Professor Challenger enjoys Christmas on a cake with some newly discovered friends, courtesy of Sharon Jones.
Photo by Mark Jones.*

(continued from other side)

... As for the bear-like monster, “something utterly unearthly and dreadful,” its kind, Hardcastle speculates, evolved underground for “countless aeons.” Lovecraft used the idea of prehistoric non-human races in a several tales, notably the ghostwritten “The Mound,” about a subterranean alien civilization in the American Southwest.

Finally, Armitage, the young man who befriends Hardcastle early on, coincidentally shares the name of one of the three Miskatonic University professors who slay the Dunwich Horror.

— Peter Cannon

Peter's commentary is posted at acdsociety.com/bjg/a/bjga. His work is joined on page 4 by commentary from Matt Hall, along with new work from Rich Krisciunas (page 3) and Dean Wilkinson (page d).

— Margie Deck and Nancy Holder

