The screenwriter Robert Lees was murdered at his Los Angeles home on 13 June, at the age of ninety-two. His many successful Hollywood movies included the 1943 Olsen & Johnson vehicle, whose opening featured Basil Rathbone’s Holmes telling Nigel Bruce’s Watson, ‘I am Sherlock Holmes. I know everything!’ Gideon Hill passes on the news that Gerald C Conroy, a leading Sherlockian in Philadelphia, died of a heart attack on 23 May.

After the death of August Derleth in 1972, his friend Basil Copper was authorized to write further adventures of Solar Pons, ‘the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street’, which he did, with remarkable success. For various reasons the longest of those exploits has remained unpublished until now. Was it worth the wait? Well, Solar Pons versus the Devil’s Claw (Sarob Press, Ty Newydd, Four Roads, Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire SA17 4SF; £25.00) is neither top quality Copper nor top quality Pons, but it is a clever, atmospheric mystery, rather reminiscent of The Hound of the Baskervilles. As Vincent Starrett said many years ago, Solar Pons is not Sherlock Holmes; he knows it, and he knows that we know it. That fact actually adds to its appeal, whether the chronicles are from Derleth’s pen or Copper’s.

Richard Lancelyn Green’s introduction to Solar Pons versus the Devil’s Claw is one of the last things he wrote for publication.

In The Secret Notebooks of Sherlock Holmes (Allison & Busby, Bon Marché Centre, 241 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BJ; £18.99) June Thomson gives us the authentic Holmes. She is one of only three current authors who can consistently capture the Watson/Doyle style to something near perfection, and the stories she writes are all of a type with the Canonical originals. Many people have imagined what might lie behind Watson’s tantalising hints of unrecorded cases; The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes and Bert Coules’s radio series The Further Adventures are at the top end of the scale, but there are many attempts that belong in the depths of pastiche hell. June Thomson’s five collections are among the best: in this latest you can read very satisfactory accounts of the atrocious behaviour of Colonel Upwood at the Nonpareil Card Club, the disappearance of the British barque In a Night Orchid, and the mysterious death of Cardinal Tosca, and four others. I should add that the author’s penchant for distracting footnotes, ostensibly the work of a Dr John F Watson, continues, and that, oddly, the publishers have not provided a list of contents.

The Watson/Doyle style is deceptively hard to reproduce. Lauren Stenihauer makes a brave stab at it in Sherlock Holmes’ Lost Adventure: The True Story of the Giant Rats of Sumatra (iUniverse Inc., 2021 Pine Lake Road, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68512, USA; $12.95). More important, however, is that he’s produced a breathtakingly exciting short novel that involves Holmes and Watson with an evil genius whose accomplishments dwarf those of ex-Professor Moriarty. Here you’ll find science gone mad. You’ll meet Charles Darwin, Gregor Mendel and a descendant of Charles Babbage (no, none of them is the villain). You’ll encounter a Victorian computer and the mysterious wisdom of an eastern cult of illuminati. And of course there are those giant rats — yes, rats in the plural. It’s a heady mixture, and it would make a grand movie, should the makers of The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen be looking for another property. This is not really Conan Doyle’s Holmes, but it is jolly good fun. Check Mr Stenihauer’s website at www.laurenstenihauer.com.

* [I see that in an earlier DM I erroneously referred to Lauren Stenihauer as ‘she’. Apologies. I must have been thinking of my new great-niece, whose name is Lauren.]*

Sherlock Holmes’ Lost Adventure is rather in the tradition of the classic French pulp fiction, and the Black Coat Press (PO Box 17270, Encino, CA 91416, USA) is doing a splendid job in publishing the best of this extraordinary genre, so like and yet so unlike its American and British equivalents, in English translation. One of the great heroes a century ago was Maurice Leblanc’s creation, the gentleman burglar Arsène Lupin (so much more stylish than his British prototype Raffles, and so much less sanctimonious) who faced Sherlock Holmes on four occasions in his varied career. In Arsène Lupin vs Sherlock Holmes: The Hollow Needle, newly translated by Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier ($20.95), we have the first encounter and the last between the master burglar and the master detective. The short story ‘Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late’ sets the tone admirably, pitting the mercurial Gallic intelligence of the one against the remorseless Anglo-Saxon logic of the other. There is a fiendishly difficult puzzle, an apparently impossible robbery, a touch of romance — and as this is Leblanc’s book, not Conan Doyle’s, Lupin wins the duel of wits, but only just. ‘The Hollow Needle’, a short novel, is naturally on a larger scale, and, although Holmes plays a vital, or rather fatal, rôle in the story, Lupin’s principal opponent here is Isidore Beauvrole, a tribute to Gaston Leroux’s young detective Rouletabille. Like many of Lupin’s exploits, this is essentially a treasure hunt, requiring the solution of some cunningly devised clues, but the devil-may-care character of the earlier tale gives way to a deeper and darker conclusion. To round off the book, the translators have written a brief, mellow tale, ‘Escape Not the Thunderbolt’, recounting a final meeting between Lupin and Holmes. They’ve also provided an informative afterword, and there’s an enthusiastic introduction by Kim Newman. Highly recommended! Later this year, to complete the Lupin-Holmes affair, the Black Coat Press will issue The Blonde Phantom. There’s a website at www.blackcoatpress.com.

From the same publisher comes The Night Orchid: Conan Doyle in Toulouse by Jean-Claude Dymayach, with a foreword by David Brin ($20.95). The work of the award-winning French science-fiction writer is not unknown to the cognoscenti, but it’s good to have fourteen of his best stories in an attractive collection. Only the title story is really relevant here, involving as it does both Arthur Conan Doyle and the young George Edward Challenger in a thrilling encounter with a monster from the distant past. There’s also a beautiful and brave young woman named Irène Adler [*sic*] and a flying machine. All this in the French city of Toulouse! It’s a story that would not have been out of place in The Strand Magazine a hundred years ago. One quibble: the description of Conan Doyle suggests an older man than the thirty-one-year-old he was in 1890.

Newly out from Calabash Press (PO Box 1360, Ashcroft, B.C., Canada V0K 1A0) is Out of the Shadows: The Untold Story of Arthur Conan Doyle’s First Family by Georgina Doyle. Biographies of Conan Doyle have tended to concentrate on the period of his second marriage and on the children of that marriage — Denys, Adrian and Jean. But a great part of his creative life predated that period. Georgina, widow of Arthur’s nephew John, fills in many of the gaps in our knowledge of his marriage to Louise and of their children, Kingsley and Mary. Prices excluding postage are (hardback) Cdn$55.00, US$42.50, £25.00; (softback) Cdn$35.00, US$25.00, £15.00. Check the website at www.ash-tree.bc.ca/calabash.html.

The first two volumes of The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, edited by Leslie S Klinger, will be published by WW Norton & Co. on 30 November. Volume three, containing the long stories, is due in 2005. There’s a website at www.annotatedsherlockholmes.com. The publisher’s British address is WW Norton Ltd, Castle House, 75/5 Wellington Street, London W1T 3OT. [*There are three volumes to come in The Sherlock Holmes Reference Library from Gasogeye Books — a separate project entirely.*]
Bill Barnes (19 Malvern Avenue, Manly, NSW 2095, Australia) has published *The Hounds Collection, volume 9* — sixty-two pages of scholarship and wit by members of *The Hounds of the Internet*. The cost, post-paid, is $65.00, US$12.00, CDN$16.00 or EUR10.00. Currency notes preferred, but cheques can be made out to R W Barnes — or pay by PayPal to bbarnes@ozemail.com.au.

The great Sherlockian bibliographer Ronald Burt De Waal is selling his collection through Sam Weller’s Zion Bookstore (254 S. Main, Salt Lake City, UT 84101, USA; e-mail tony@samwellers.com; website www.samwellers.com). The collection is offered en bloc for $80,000, transportation costs to be determined.

There are new catalogues from Nigel Williams Rare Books (25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; nwilliamsbook@tcp.co.uk); and *The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box* (George Vanderbilt, Box 204, Shelburne, Ontario, Canada L0N 1S0; gay@bmts.com) — due late 2004 or early 2005 is *VS on SH*: Vincent Starrett on *Sherlock Holmes*, Starrett’s complete Sherlockian writings compiled and edited by Karen Murdock.

Susie Drost tells me that *The Mongolia Society* (322 Goodbody Hall, Indiana University, 1011 East Third, Bloomington, IN 47405-7005, USA; e-mail monsoc@indiana.edu) currently has available *Stories about Sherlock Holmes Book 6* (*FIVE, SPEC & ABBE*) and *Book 7* (*DANC, CROO & SECO*) in the Mongolian (cyrillic) script, priced at $30.00 each, plus postage.

MC Black has several copies of the very collectible catalogue from the auction of the Conan Doyle Collection at Christie’s in London on 19 May. They’re available at $100.00 each, including Royal Mail special delivery, to members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, the money going to the Parkinson’s Disease Society. From MC at Hardknott, 25 Chadwell, Ware, Herts. SG12 9JY. Full details are on the Society’s website www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk.

Conan Doyle’s notebook from his years as a medical student was bought by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, and is on temporary display at the Surgeons Hall museum. The book also contains the manuscript of ‘The American’s Story’, the second story he wrote for publication. The College will celebrate its quincentenary next year. Forbes Gibb notes that Glasgow City Council bought the records already held at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. They’re available at £10.00 each, including Royal Mail special delivery, to members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of Medicine, and are on the Society’s website www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk.

The July issue of *Book and Magazine Collector* (Unit 101, 140 Wales Farm Road, London W3 6UG) contains Richard Dalby’s report on the auction.

At Christie’s in New York on 9 June first editions of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* sold for a total of $9,560, and the manuscript of *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire* fetched $399,500.


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