



## **Sherlock Holmes: Behind the Canonical Screen**

Edited & introduced by  
Lyndsay Faye and  
Ashley Polasek

Order it at: [www.bakerstreetjournal.com](http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com)

272 pages, 10" x 7" trade paperback,  
December 2015  
With 42 color and 38 b&w illustrations

*Sherlock Holmes: Behind the Canonical Screen* was the third Baker Street Irregulars' officially sponsored Conference, and the first event held on the West Coast. Emphasizing the full range of Sherlockian cinema, it was a unique collaboration between the Baker Street Irregulars and the UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television. The conference, held in 2012, was developed as an academic event examining the films of Sherlock Holmes and the craft of creating them. The presenters covered a wide range of topics, from Holmes in cartoon form to the earliest versions of Holmes on the screen, in England, the United States, and around the world.

As part of the conference, John Musker and Ron Clements talked about their work in animation at the Walt Disney Studios, including their involvement as co-directors of *The Great Mouse Detective*.

### **Animating Sherlock Holmes: The Great Mouse Detective** with John Musker and Ron Clements

Their discussion begins on the next page.

## **Animating Sherlock Holmes: *The Great Mouse Detective***

with John Musker and Ron Clements

CLEMENTS: I was part of an animation development program at Disney; I started at Disney when I was about twenty. The first animated feature that I worked on was a feature called *The Rescuers*. I was an animator on the film *The Rescuers*. While I was working on *The Rescuers*, I walked into a book store one day, and I noticed, for the first time, the books by Eve Titus.

I wasn't familiar with the books until that point, but I saw *Basil of Baker Street*. I'd always associated Disney and Sherlock Holmes; I don't know why, maybe because a lot of Disney was set in Victorian London. So I was always looking for an angle where we could do that. Then, when I saw the Eve Titus books, that seemed like a way to do an animated feature about Sherlock Holmes. The only problem was that we were doing *The Rescuers* at the time, which was also about mice detectives! So it didn't really seem like the right time.

A few years after that, John and I were both working in Story on the film *The Black Cauldron*, and while we were working on that, the producer of *The Black Cauldron*, Joe Hale, was saying that they were looking for new projects. They were trying to find ideas for new projects. I just sort of casually mentioned *Basil of Baker Street*, and Joe liked the idea. He had an artist named Mel Shaw do some artwork, just to visualize what the film might be. That was presented to Ron Miller, who was the head of the studio at that time. I wasn't there when it was presented, but Ron liked the idea. They bought the rights to the Eve Titus books, and that, essentially, is how *Basil* got started.

MUSKER: I'll talk a little bit about my involvement. I too grew up very much a Holmes fan. I remember I got the book *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as a kid. I think I was about eleven or twelve, and I got it as a gift. I read it in one sitting, and I was just fascinated by that whole world and the atmosphere. I proceeded to read a number of the stories — I don't think I can claim to have read all of them, as Ron did.

Also, growing up in Chicago, as I did, in the sixties there was "Sherlock Holmes Theatre" on television, where Basil Rathbone himself introduced the films on WGN. Basil Rathbone at that time was in his seventies and looked nothing like the person in the films! As a kid, I was like, "who's this old guy in the chair with the glasses and the stringy hair?" Still, it was great to see those films on a regular basis on television.

Flash forward to the mid-seventies when I came to Disney. It was a slightly different path than Ron: I came from CalArts. I was part of the first year of the character animation class at CalArts. Some Disney veterans who had retired went on to teach character animation to students at CalArts — the first year’s class was in 1975. There were a few others in that class who went on to do big things — John Lasseter, who went on to direct *Toy Story* and was “Mr. Pixar;” Brad Bird, who did *The Incredibles* and *Ratatouille*; and Tim Burton was a year behind us at school.

Another CalArts person who played a big part of *Basil* was Joe Ranft. Joe was a couple of years behind us, but he was a story man at Pixar. He died a very tragic death about seven years ago in an auto accident at the age of forty-five. He was one of the early story men. We did a version when we were going to work on *Basil of Baker Street* — I was put in charge of it, at least for a while — and that initial version when we started the project was not the one that made it to the screen.

CLEMENTS: John was the director, and I was doing story when *Basil* began —

MUSKER: Right. So I enjoyed the Eve Titus books, but I felt that I wanted to do something a little bit wackier, perhaps, so, in a way, the first version of *Basil of Baker Street* owed something to Monty Python and *The Goon Show* — the British things. It had that sort of sensibility a little bit. In my first version, Basil didn’t play the violin, he played the tuba when he wanted to relax. Dawson was modeled after Eric Larson, one of the Nine Old Men,<sup>1</sup> and he was almost kind of a lady’s man. He was a very rotund guy, but he was a chick magnet! It was a little bit zany, and, in fact, we agreed that one of the initial ideas for the voice of Basil was John Cleese. We were big fans of Monty Python. But I think John Cleese wasn’t at all interested, and we developed an early version of the movie — for about six months we worked on a version — that was in this vein of being a little bit crazy.

The idea in our early version was that we were going to tell the story like *Citizen Kane*. We were going to start on Dawson in a veteran’s hospital, and he was going to be telling the story in flashback like Joseph Cotten did in *Citizen Kane*. All the Afghanistan war veterans were shell-shocked, and if anybody dropped a pin, everybody would jump and run. It was just kind of wacky.

The idea of Holmes — Basil — we went back to the source material, to Conan Doyle, and we really felt like he was very much a manic-depressive

---

<sup>1</sup> Disney’s Nine Old Men were a core group of animators for The Walt Disney Company, and included Les Clark, Marc Davis, Ollie Johnston, Milt Kahl, Ward Kimball, Eric Larson, John Lounsbery, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Frank Thomas. They developed many of Disney’s most well-known animated characters. All are now deceased.

# Behind the Canonical Screen – Book Excerpt

To read the rest of their discussion, order the book at our website:

<http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com>

*Sherlock Holmes: Behind the Canonical Screen*

Edited & introduced by

Lyndsay Faye and

Ashley Polasek

## About BSI Publications

The Baker Street Irregulars, the literary society dedicated to the study of Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and the Victorian world, publishes *The Baker Street Journal*, the BSI Manuscript Series, the International Series, and select non-series works. All of these can be ordered at our website: