

Elegy for a Different Superhero in ‘Mr. Holmes’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 17, 2015 - 10:51am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Sherlock Holmes is the most famous fictional detective in literary history, and his character adaptation into movies, TV and other media shows no sign of slowing down. But what if Holmes were real, and lived as an old man past World War II? This scenario is explored in “Mr. Holmes.”

This story is adapted from a novel by Mitch Cullin (“A Slight Trick of the Mind”), one of the many writers over the years that have extended the Holmes legacy of the detective’s creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes’ power of deduction, reasoning and extensive knowledge has fascinated several generations of readers, movie goers and Benedict Cumberbatch fans (he plays Holmes on the popular BBC-TV modern adaptation). “Mr. Holmes” has all of the joy and mystery of the character, portrayed as a 93 year-old by Sir Ian McKellen. The film ponders end-of-lifetime issues, including morality, self-worth and even loneliness for the detective, and touches upon life’s choices and possible regrets. It’s a beautiful and worthy tribute to a iconic character.

In 1947, the long-retired Sherlock Holmes (McKellen) lives in a remote house in Sussex, with his housekeeper Mrs. Munro (Laura Linney) and her son Roger (Milo Parker). His advanced age of 93 is causing memory issues, as his last case – chronicled in as usual in story form by his companion Dr. John Watson – is starting to bother his consciousness. He tries writing down the actual events, but can’t remember the key elements.



Sir Ian McKellen at Sherlock's Address in 'Mr. Holmes'

Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

Roger is fascinated by the legendary gentleman, and seeks counsel regarding his deductive powers and beekeeping skills. This distresses his mother, a war widow, and she wants to find other employment. When Holmes falls temporarily ill, the desire to find the truth of the last case becomes accelerated, and involves a flashback to Japan and a Mr. Umezaki (Hiroyuki Sanada), plus the need by Sherlock Holmes to understand what his life has meant.

What fans admire about the character of Holmes is his cold logic, and his ability to separate his emotional consciousness from the case at hand, which is exactly what the film explores. The richness of the Holmes character is magnificently brought to life by Sir Ian, who creates the conflict of dealing with old age and old ghosts while embracing the dignity of the famous detective. It's also groovy that Holmes interacts with history and reality in this story, and his books are indeed written by Dr. John Watson – there are two great instances in which he is shown reading the first books and attending a film adaptation.

This is essentially a three-person play (Holmes, his housekeeper and her son), accentuated by flashbacks of the particulars of the last case and his visit to Japan. He seeks a compound called "prickly ash," which supposedly builds memory and mind function. This places Sherlock Holmes in Hiroshima not long after the atomic bomb was dropped on the city, and provides a mystery with Mr. Umezaki which provides a key to a future realization. The story set up and follow through are handled masterfully by veteran director Bill Condon.

The supporting players rise up to the standard that Sir Ian sets, with the ever-reliable Laura Linney handling a sad war widow to perfection, and the child actor Milo Parker as Roger creating a vital spark to keep Holmes going in his dotage. Roger is embarrassed at the same time of his conventional housekeeper mother, which is an unexpected yet crucial part of the household relationship. British actress Hattie Morahan is haunting as the mysterious Mrs. Kelmot, the main player in the last case of Holmes, who bedevils his memory.



Mrs. Kelmot (Hattie Morahan) is an Element in the Last Case of ‘Mr. Holmes’
Photo credit: Roadside Attractions

If there is any less-than-stellar critique it might involve the two cases working simultaneously. It is fascinating to see what is really involved in detective work, versus what the old Holmes watches on a movie screen (highly comic), but the workings of the last case, and the Japanese incident, go down paths that had fairly soft resolutions – which is a lesson in real life, I suppose. However, the major circumstance of the film remains centered on McKellen’s Sherlock Holmes, and he is given all the integrity, dignity and finally, emotional bearing that he deserves. The character means so much to so many, and so it remains.

Next up for this version of Holmes – “The Case of Being Six Feet Under.” Despite all of his prolific powers of reason and deduction, it will be his final solution. That is a mystery that no one can solve.

“Mr. Holmes” opens nationwide on July 17th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Ian McKellen. Laura Linney, Milo Parker, Hattie Morahan and Hiroyuki Sanada. Screenplay adapted by Jeffery Hatcher, based on a novel by Mitch Cullin. Directed by Bill Condon. Rated “PG”



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