

A Study Guide to Aquila Theatre's Production of

# The Hound of the Baskervilles

written by Conan Doyle, adapted by James Lavender



**S**herlock Holmes and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* remain popular largely because they sit at the crossroads of mystery, atmosphere, and enduring cultural myth.

Holmes himself is a timeless figure: brilliant but eccentric, logical yet human enough to feel real. Each generation rediscovers him—through new films, series, and adaptations—and finds his methods surprisingly modern. The idea of solving problems through observation and reasoning has never felt outdated.

*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, in particular, continues to captivate readers because it blends classic detective fiction with gothic suspense. The fog-shrouded moor, the cursed family, and the spectral hound create a mood that lingers long after the story ends. It's one of the few Holmes tales where the rational detective steps into what appears to be a supernatural world, and that tension keeps drawing readers back.

Together, Holmes and the Baskerville mystery endure because they strike a perfect balance: comforting familiarity paired with just enough darkness and intrigue to feel fresh each time the story is told.

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# About Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



About the Author: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930)

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Doyle trained as a doctor before turning to writing. His keen eye for detail and understanding of human behavior gave life to the world's most famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, first appearing in "A Study in Scarlet" (1887).

He lived during the Victorian and Edwardian eras—times of scientific progress, industrial expansion, and fascination with logic and the unknown.

That tension between reason and mystery runs through all his work. Doyle also wrote historical fiction, science-fiction adventures (*The Lost World*), and essays on spiritualism. Yet Sherlock Holmes remained his greatest creation—a detective whose methods of observation and deduction changed the shape of mystery writing forever.

**Fun Fact:** When Doyle killed off Holmes in 1893, public outrage was so great that he revived the detective ten years later!

# SYNOPSIS

Dr. Mortimer brings Sherlock Holmes a legend: a demonic hound that has cursed the Baskerville family for generations.

When young Sir Henry Baskerville inherits his uncle's estate on the misty Dartmoor moors, strange happenings begin—footprints, howls, and whispered warnings.

Holmes sends Dr. Watson to guard Sir Henry while he secretly investigates nearby.

In the end, Holmes exposes the villain: Stapleton, a distant relative using a real, phosphorescent hound to frighten Sir Henry to death and claim the fortune.

Science and reason triumph over superstition—but not before many chills and twists.



# CAST OF CHARACTERS



<b>Sherlock Holmes</b>	<b>Brilliant detective, master of logic and observation.</b>
<b>Dr. John Watson</b>	<b>Loyal companion, narrator, and courageous friend.</b>
<b>Sir Henry Baskerville</b>	<b>Heir to the estate; target of the curse.</b>
<b>Dr. Mortimer</b>	<b>Country doctor who brings the mystery to Holmes.</b>
<b>Stapleton</b>	<b>Naturalist and villain disguised as a friend.</b>
<b>Beryl Stapleton</b>	<b>His “sister,” actually his wife; warns Watson.</b>
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Barrymore</b>	<b>Servants hiding a family secret.</b>
<b>The Hound</b>	<b>The terrifying embodiment of fear and superstition.</b>

## Tor

– A rocky hill or large stone outcrop common in regions like Dartmoor.

## Languid

– Slow, weak, or lacking energy

## Inquest

– A legal investigation into the cause of a death.

# Pardon me?

## Baronet

– A hereditary title below a baron but above most knights; the holder is addressed as “Sir.”

## Moor

– A large, open, uncultivated stretch of land, often bleak, boggy, and windswept.

## Yeoman

– A farmer who owns and works his own land; also a historical social class.

## Spectral

– Ghostlike or resembling a spirit.

## Miasmatic

– Having a foul, unhealthy smell; associated with “bad air.”

# ADAPTATIONS

Adapter/Writer James Lavender adapted Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story into a play for the stage but The Hound of the Baskervilles has also been adapted into films and Television.

The  
**HOUND**  
of the  
**BASKERVILLES**  
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

1901–1902: First Serialized in The Strand Magazine.

THE STRAND MAGAZINE.  
Vol. xxi. AUGUST, 1901. No. 128.  
The Hound of the Baskervilles.  
ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF  
SHERLOCK HOLMES.  
By CONAN DOYLE.

CHAPTER I.  
MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES,  
who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a "Pompadour" stick. Just under the head was a broad silver band, nearly an inch across. "To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the C.C.H.," was engraved upon it, with the date "1884." It was just such a stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry—dignified, solid, and reassuring.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of it?"  
Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of my occupation.

"How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head."

"I have, at least, a well-polished silver-plated coffee-pot in front of me," said he.

"But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him, and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it."

"I think," said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, "that Dr. Mortimer is a successful elderly medical man."

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud too to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the stick from my hands

1939: Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce define Holmes and Watson on film



2010–2017: BBC Television series starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman



# A Play Within a Play

## Aquila's New Adaptation



In our version, Holmes and Watson have hired a local actor—Sir Anthony Kneecap—to help them re-enact the case for the Dartmoor community.

They are joined by Holmes’s beloved housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson, who keeps the production (and the detectives) in line.

Four actors perform the entire story: two take on multiple roles with lightning-fast costume changes, slapstick, and wit.

The result is a farcical comedy that celebrates both the original mystery and the joy of live theatre.

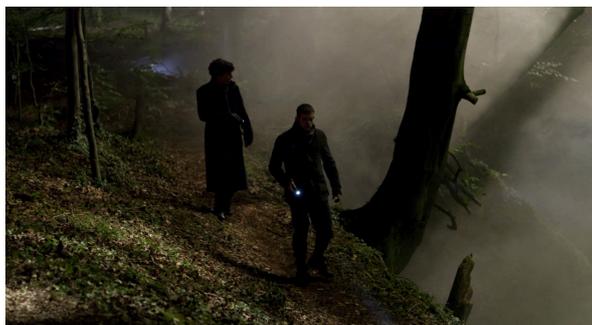
### Our Characters

- Sherlock Holmes – Brilliant but vain detective, loves the drama of his own deductions.
- Dr. Watson – Faithful partner and narrator, often the voice of reason.
- Sir Grover Drake-Billets – A made-up character: an enthusiastic local actor who plays many parts (badly).
- Mrs. Hudson – Holmes’s housekeeper, maternal and witty; a fan-favorite from the Holmes canon.

### The Audience Plays a Part

In Aquila’s production, the audience becomes the villagers of Dartmoor, watching the “re-enactment” of the Hound case. You might be asked to react, cheer, or even help solve the mystery!

Stay alert for unexpected twists and surprises—because in this *Hound of the Baskervilles*, you might find yourself in on the act!



# It's elementary!



How does Sir Arthur Conan Doyle use the setting of the moor to create suspense in the story?

What role does superstition play in the Baskerville legend, and how does it affect the characters' actions?

In what ways does Dr. Watson contribute to solving the mystery, and how does his approach differ from Holmes's?

What clues help reveal the true identity and motives of the villain?

How does the theme of appearance versus reality shape the novel's central mystery?

