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Sherlock Holmes Theatre

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Blackstone Audiobooks (February 2005)
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Dr. Watson is flabbergasted at the landlady's bombshell, though Holmes merely shrugs until Watson starts to remonstrate with Holmes about financial matters. After all, with Holmes retiring, how is Watson to sell any more of his chronicles to pay his gambling debts, especially when Holmes threatens to sic his "solicitor" on the good doctor if he doesn't cease his annoying writings?

This scene is from the comedic play written by Yuri Rasovsky, "Ghastly Double Murder in Famed Detective's Flat," one of this trilogy of audio recordings. The play is an unexpected delight, an uproarious romp in a Sherlockian parallel universe, where Holmes and Watson are manipulative rivals rather than friends. The harangue Holmes endures from his long-suffering landlady, Mrs. Hudson, is especially hilarious. In a thick Scottish brogue, she chides Holmes for once again leaving "viscera" for her to clean up after he nonchalantly shoots a skulker in his apartment. She follows with details of his "abusiveness" over the years, including his "incredible messiness, fiddle screeching, malodorous experiments, drug-induced rampages" and the "countless malefactors breaking in, hiding in me pantry, and bleeding all over me coal chute!" The one-act play, a lively spoof, draws to a hysterical, plot-twisting conclusion.

The other two recordings are dramatizations of the only two plays that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote. "Sherlock Holmes" pits the brilliant detective against his archenemy, the "Napoleon of Crime," Professor Moriarty. The game is afoot as Moriarty tightens his sinister tentacles on an unwary London. When he confronts Holmes at the detective's apartment, in a last-ditch attempt to dissuade Holmes from disrupting his criminal empire, the sharp repartee between the two makes for compelling drama.

"The Speckled Band" features Holmes and Watson embroiled in a tale of madness, murder, and avarice at a country estate. What is the secret behind the death of a young woman's sister, whose dying words were, "The speckled band"? Only Holmes can deduce the answer and save his young charge from certain death.

Harkening back to the Golden Days of Radio, these three audio presentations are outstanding. They are superbly produced, and the voice work by the performers is spot on, especially Dwight Schultz, who portrays the murderous Dr. Roylott with frightening malice as he threatens Holmes and others in "The Speckled Band." Martin Jarvis and Kristoffer Tabori are also excellent as Holmes and Watson, respectively.

This audio book will delight all Sherlock Holmes fans and anyone who enjoys the great radio programs of the past. Listening to "Sherlock Holmes" and "The Speckled Band," in particular, would be an excellent introduction for a teenage reader or other novitiate to the treasure trove of stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.
ALAN J. COUTURE (August 18, 2009)

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