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Michael Giltz

Freelance writer and raconteur
Posted: April 4, 2010 07:59 PM

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DVDs: Sherlock Holmes-Apalooza!

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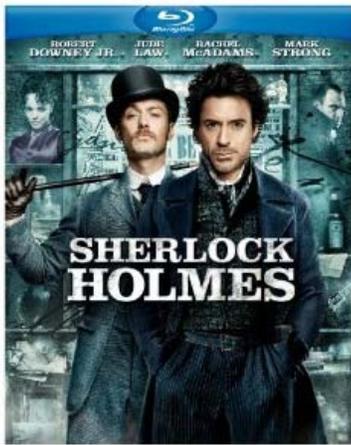
As a little boy, one of the first proper books I got as a gift was a two volume Book Of The Month Club edition of Doubleday's *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. I then feasted on the Basil Rathbone/Nigel Bruce movies. I recognized *The Great Mouse Detective* as the turning point in Disney's animated fortunes (as the new documentary *Waking Sleeping Beauty* confirms). And while there have been too many adaptations of Holmes for me to claim I've seen them *all*, I've certainly seen quite a few. So I feel as prepared as anyone who is not a member of the Baker Street Irregulars to tackle the wave of Holmesiana that has arrived on DVD.

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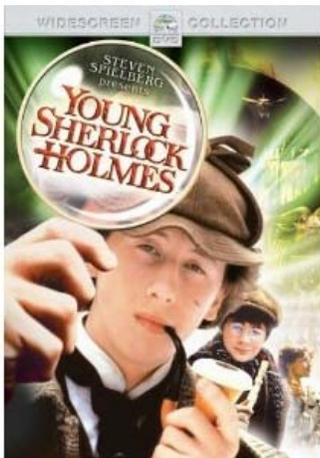
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BECK IN TROUBLE?



SHERLOCK HOLMES (\$28.98 Warner Bros.) -- London looks like a theme park ride more than a city bristling with danger, the mystery is banal, the villain even banaler (ok, sorry about that one), and Guy Ritchie's film is filled with Holmes making one daring leap after another when of course what Holmes is really known for is one daring leap *of logic* after another. And yet... and yet, damned if I didn't enjoy myself quite a bit, thanks mostly to the casting of Robert Downey Jr. as Holmes and Jude Law as the long-suffering, quite intelligent Dr. Watson. Holmes, like any person with a hint of Asperger's or a touch of autism or just a cranky but brilliant demeanor, hates change. So Watson's impending marriage perturbs him no end. Their back and forth is far more gripping than the asinine faux mystical threat of a villain who turns out to be just a pawn for the lurking but as yet unseen Professor Moriarty. One restaurant scene captures the truly great film this might have been: Holmes is shown as bombarded with information, his mind incapable of resting and not cataloging snippets of detail and drawing informed conclusions about the larcenous waiter, the lady waiting for a lover, the businessman and so on. It's an almost hellish glimpse into the fevered workings of his brain. Holmes as a tortured genius whose greatest weapon is not his brawn but his brain? That's a Holmes I recognize and one that Downey Jr. is perfectly prepared to deliver. Here's hoping the sequel lets him do so.



YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES (\$14.98; Paramount) -- Spectacular stunts? Special effects? Like the new film, this Barry Levinson would-be franchise bobbles a fine idea (Holmes and Watson meeting as boys) and ignores everything that makes the great detective special. In this case, there is no vivid, witty acting to make up for the script's cluelessness. It seemed misguided at the time and certainly hasn't aged well: Holmes has to invent a flying machine to succeed at the finale? Please.

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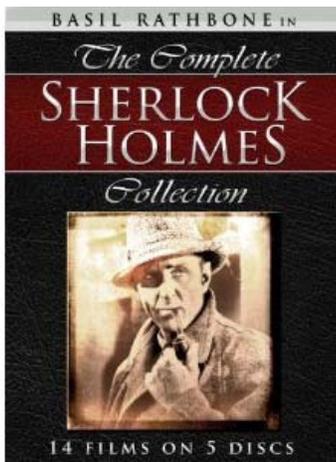


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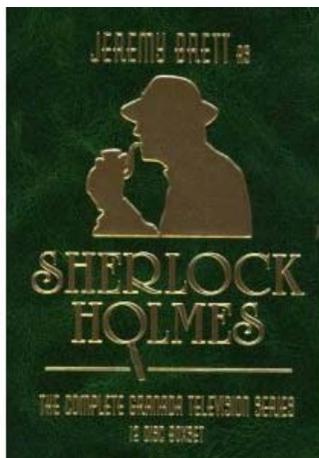
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THE COMPLETE SHERLOCK HOLMES COLLECTION (\$129.98; MPI) -- For many years, the Basil Rathbone-Nigel Bruce films were the definitive image of Sherlock Holmes, even though only two of them were set in Arthur Conan Doyle's day and the rest oddly took place in the 30s and 40s as Holmes and Watson battled Nazis and generally defended Empire. But for all the weaknesses of the later entries in this 14 part series, Rathbone embodies Holmes so effortlessly that he colored the way we read the stories and novels forever after. How could you not picture him when reading those feats of derring-do? Bruce of course was more bumbling than the original Watson but a fine way for us to at least feel cleverer than someone on screen. The UCLA Theater Archives did a smashing job of restoring all the films; they surely look better than the prints we watched and rewatched on TV for all those years. No one could ever top Rathbone, could they?



SHERLOCK HOLMES: THE COMPLETE GRANADA TELEVISION SERIES (\$229.98; MPI) -- Yes, it was simply inconceivable that anyone could ever supplant Basil Rathbone as Holmes...until Jeremy Brett came along. He had several advantages over Rathbone: times had changed, so people were ready to embrace the drug habit of Holmes, which surely makes him more interesting. Better still, Brett was performing in episodes actually based on the writing of Conan Doyle, rather than new mysteries that could rarely hope to equal the inventiveness of the originals. And he was working in a television series, which allowed him to embody the role completely for 41 adventures over a series of years. Thank God it has been remastered nicely with every show presented in order (and God willing, they'll do the same for Poirot some day soon). I've seen the shows so many times that I haven't yet watched the whole series in order again, just dipped in to check on the quality of the prints. What made Brett so great was his willingness to embrace the oddness of Holmes, the genuinely strange creature that he was. But as the series progressed, he grew increasingly mannered. I'll have to see it all over again to decide if this was a reflection of Holmes' dissolution over the years (cocaine can be wearing) or Brett simply trying to keep things interesting for himself. So every generation will provide its own Holmes (and Downey Jr. is a good one in search of a good script), but it is clear that Jeremy Brett's version is one for the ages and the yardstick by which all others will be measured.



John Edwards Proposes to Mistress Already?



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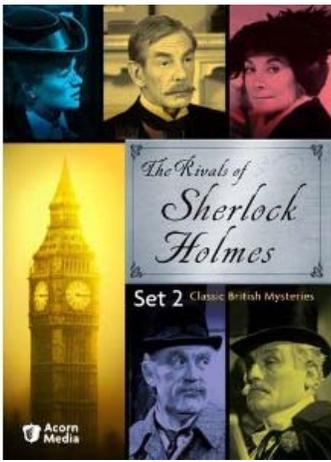
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Most Anticipated Indie Albums of 2011



THE RIVALS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES SET 2 (\$59.99; Acorn) -- While I gobbled up the Basil Rathbone movies, this British series from the early 70s was absolutely new to me when *Set 1* came out last year. It's a very ambitious show: instead of launching one or even two sleuths akin to Holmes, it's an omnibus of twelve different protagonists (in 13 tales), all based on stories and novels written at the same time as Conan Doyle and featuring similar Victorian-era heroes (or anti-heroes) dabbling in deduction. Derek Jacobi, Jean Marsh and John Thaw are among the actors who pop in and the central characters range from reporters to police inspectors to professors and even a gypsy. Fun stuff all around.

ALSO OUT ON DVD:



THE 39 STEPS (\$19.98; BBC) -- To follow on from Holmes, here's the upmteenth version of John Buchan's prototypical adventure tale. While faithfulness is admirable in a relationship, it's not always desirable when turning a book into a film. Still, it would be nice if someone actually just filmed the novel for a change, rather than mixing and matching details from the marvelous Alfred Hitchcock film and other versions, throwing in a romance, etc. Rupert Penry-Jones is wonderfully unflappable as the hero Richard Hannay, but he's undermined by some very silly plot twists, especially the groaner at the end. But with four or five other Hannay tales to choose from, here's hoping he gets another shot at it. Strictly for spy-loving Anglophiles.



(SLIDESHOW)
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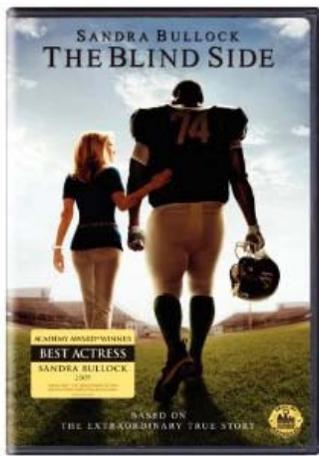
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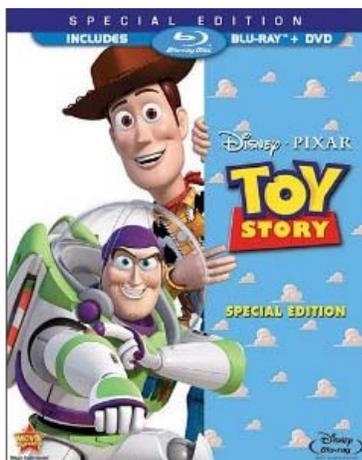
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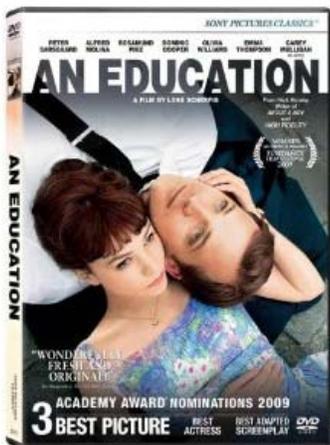
THE BLIND SIDE (\$28.98 regular and \$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.) -- This is by no means a good movie. But this tale of a well-to-do family that takes in a disadvantaged youth and gives him home, security -- and a chance to play football (!) -- has some very admirable qualities. First and foremost is Sandra Bullock. From the trailers, I literally feared seeing this film and the scenery-chewing Southern mama I expected her to play. Instead, Bullock gave quite a restrained, subtle performance (an Oscar winner no less) in which this woman keeps her emotions to herself. And other moments are similarly low-key in a nice way. Yes, you can finish some of the dialogue before she does (when a friend says that she's changing this young man's life, you just know she's going to say he's changing hers, etc.). But all in all, a pain-free bit of do-gooding.



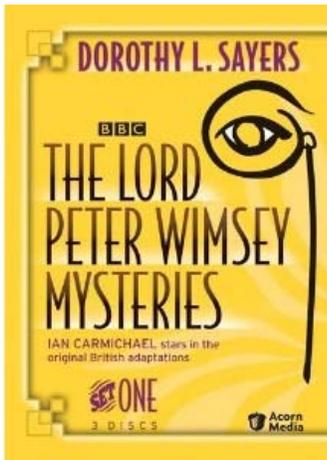
TOY STORY AND TOY STORY 2 (\$39.98 BluRay; Disney) -- These new special editions feature the brilliant animated films on BluRay and DVD, with DVD only editions coming in May when *Toy Story 3* comes out. If you don't own the movies, for the love of God buy them right away. But if you do own them, especially the boxed set, is it necessary to upgrade? You will find a new sharpness to the detail, but not so much that anyone but fanatics should feel obliged to shell out. Besides, they surely will come out with a boxed set of all three films in the fall, so this doesn't seem quite the time unless money is no object and you want to show off your BluRay player. These two films are so wonderful, I worried about them making yet another sequel. But every trailer has been so promising, I'm chomping at the bit to see *Toy Story 3* and anxiously hoping they've done the series proud.



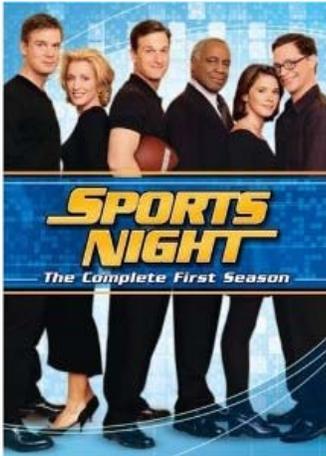
ALVIN & THE CHIPMUNKS: THE SQUEAKQUEL (\$29.98 regular, \$39.98 BluRay; Fox) -- Whoever coined the phrase "squeakquel" deserved a big fat bonus because that's the cleverest part of this follow-up to the wildly successful live-action launch of the singing chipmunks at the movies. Jason Lee presumably had better things to do because he appears only briefly at the beginning and the end. Zachary Levi of *Chuck* is an amiable presence but his loser persona is no match for Lee's warm-hearted parental figure. Chip-ettes are the major innovation here, a trio of singing female chipmunks and that's about it, with lessons learned quickly and painlessly. The interaction between humans and the chipmunks is seamless, which is quite impressive. But handpuppets would be fine if it meant a better script. The very young will enjoy it.



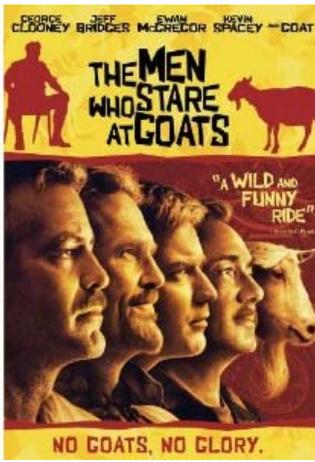
AN EDUCATION (\$28.96; Sony Pictures Classics) -- Jenny is simply smarter than most everyone around her (or at least thinks she is). She's smarter than her parents, surely; smarter than the teachers who counsel caution rather than controversy; smarter than the boys who tentatively woo her; smarter than just about everyone but the handsome, dashing older man who befriends her during a downpour and soon whisks her off to a London in the early 60s filled with fashion and fun. Similarly, Carey Mulligan -- who plays Jenny -- is better than the film that surrounds her. It has an impeccable cast including Alfred Molina, Dominic Cooper, Emma Thompson and the always unreliable Peter Sarsgaard as the seducer. It also has a screenplay that tries to turn this rather pedestrian tale into something unusual, gliding over the rather odd spectacle of two stick in the mud parents charmed by a middle aged Jew with designs on their daughter. In England. In the early 60s. Saying "it happened" is no defense for not making it believable. The denouement is terribly disappointing, as it must have been for Jenny. But Mulligan is a real find.



THE LORD PETER WIMSEY MYSTERIES COLLECTION SET 1 (\$49.99; Acorn) -- Well, this is a step backwards. Previously, the Ian Carmichael TV shows as Lord Peter Wimsey (a really great mystery series that got better and better with each book) was available in a rather bulky, overpriced boxed set. It was crying out for some remastering and a nice new version that packaged them all neatly and simply in a smaller, more compact set. Instead, they've broken it up. Here you get two adventures, running about ten hours total on three discs. Yes, it's substantial in length but there's not a soul on the planet who wants to own just these two tales. And they're just as bulky as ever. A fine, foppish series that should have been offered in one complete collection.



SPORTS NIGHT SEASON ONE (\$29.97; Shout Factory) -- Ok, here we go again. This show only ran two seasons and has already been released as a complete set. So why put out a new edition with only one season? Here's my rule of thumb: any show that runs three seasons or less should ONLY be put out in a complete set. Anyone who loves the show enough to buy one season surely wants BOTH seasons (or all three). And anyone who doesn't want both seasons won't be enticed into just one. What would they say? "Oh, I didn't really like that show, but it's only one season, so why not?" I know this can be an expensive proposition for smaller companies and surely Shout has done right by the show with some nice new extras. But personally, I don't really give a hoot about extras. I really don't. They're fine, but what I really want is the show itself presented as nicely and cheaply as possible. If you don't know it, this is a smart and engaging series about an ESPN-like network, but creator Aaron Sorkin's earnest style really fit the White House far better. Great cast, though.



THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS (\$29.98; Anchor Bay) -- This George Clooney comedy is based on the true-ish stories of the US military's exploration of psychic abilities and the paranormal as potential weapons for war. It's spun into a far too elaborate story of a journalist (Ewan McGregor) who stumbles on Clooney and the loony story of psychic research prompted by hippie and career soldier Jeff Bridges. There are modest laughs in the film but it has a convoluted structure and takes forever to tell a very slight tale of LSD and competing psychics. It doesn't help that the backdrop of 9-11 and prisoner torture takes some of the larkiness out of the goofy tone of the film. Clooney is game and McGregor was lucky casting: the tons of jokes about Jedi warriors naturally have an added spin here. Not much else does.



FANTASTIC MR. FOX (\$29.98 regular or \$39.99 BluRay) -- Here's a more successful George Clooney film, though it's always nice to see how adventurous he can be even when the film falls flat, like *The Men Who Stare At Goats*. In this case, director Wes Anderson regains his mojo with this stop-motion adaptation of the Roald Dahl novel (about the only one of Dahl's I actually enjoy) in which a fox gets his friends to gang up on the rapacious humans. The film is modestly ambitious, hoping for and achieving a loopy, low-key note of wry affection for its characters, whether it's the gotta-steal Mr. Fox, his under-achieving son (Jason Schwartzman) or his not-so-understanding wife (Meryl Streep). Anderson's obsessiveness pays dividends in the look of the film, which is really a joy to behold and the movie's main reason for being. It's so tactile, so oddly beautiful, you want to reach out and stroke it.

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Meryl Streep attended the opening night of "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" last night in NYC wearing blue-tinted spectacles, a floral blouse and belted



blue pants....

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 **whatalaname2** Watching Sherlock Holmes, I really dont like Jude Law.
1 minute ago from *Twitter for iPad*

 **astarkdan** @JenSuperhug Robert Downey Jr as Sherlock Holmes - Win. Epic,

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Gasparilla 07:31 AM on 4/06/2010 

147 Fans

Sherlock Holmes was very good. I was prepared not to like it and I did. Just because it doesn't match some purist definition of what a Holmes movie must be, doesn't mean it wasn't thoroughly entertaining. I liked the books as a kid and liked this movie, and the main reason was the performances of Downey and especially Jude Law.

I thought Men Who Stare at Goats was excellent. Much better than Clooney's lame Up In the Air, which was really nothing like the groundbreaker it was proclaimed to be. Confirmed batchelor gets his heart broken. That's new.

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 **HUFFPOST BLOGGER**
Tallulah Morehead 06:10 PM on 4/06/2010 

377 Fans

That you preferred the idiocy of MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS to UP IN THE AIR tells me all I need to know about your liking SHERLOCK HOLMES. If you'd put up your second paragraph first, I wouldn't have had to read both paragraphs, as I'd already know your opinions are valules.

Gasparilla 10:23 PM on 4/06/2010



147 Fans

You liked Up In The Air because you like everything all tied up in some nice little neat package at the end. And you could see it coming for a mile that Clooney's girlfriend was involved with someone else. How many times do we have to read you didn't like this Holmes? We get it already. As I said, you seem to think no one can like this movie because it doesn't fit your exact definition of what a Holmes movie must be. Must be according to you, that is. Quite frankly, your droning on with your judgements of everyone who doesn't see it your way is the real bore.

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research 07:00 PM on 4/10/2010



708 Fans

Oh, goats was just too sophisticated for ya. There really was a mk ultra project, they really did this stuff, they really did give acid to people.

And we really do need to learn a new way to find a way to wage war without violence.

. Hearts and Minds has always been the winning solution.

;)

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Cat MacKinnon 03:34 AM on 4/06/2010

1 Fans

as someone who grew up reading Sherlock Holmes (and has read every Holmes story many times over), Ritchie's "envisioning" only superficially resembles anything Arthur Conan Doyle wrote (and even that's a stretch.) to say that Ritchie's movie is "the truest to the original material" is basically admitting that you've never read any of the original books or stories, and sometimes i wonder if Ritchie himself ever read any of them. i found Ritchie's movie mildly entertaining at best, but mostly just wondered how much longer the movie was.

i still think Jeremy Brett's Holmes is the yardstick to be measured by. Jeremy Brett did a fantastic job of portraying Holmes as closely to the original material as possible, something he took pride in. obviously any adaptation will require some concessions, but with Brett's series, those were very few. in fact, when Brett realised how popular it was with children, he and the producers went to Doyle's family and asked if it they could stop mentioning Holme's cocaine addiction so as not to make it seem as if they were glamorizing it (ACD's family gladly gave them permission.) this was probably the biggest change to the original material in the BBC series.

to this day, whenever i go back and read a Holmes story, i can't help but picture Jeremy Brett as Holmes and Edward Hardwicke as Watson. even in my own little mind, the way they portrayed the characters fits in perfectly with the original books.

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kkaylynne 02:01 PM on 4/06/2010

0 Fans

I recently rewatched Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke (the Granada series) on Netflix. Most of their episodes are available as Instant View, which uses Silverlight. Beautiful quality!

I first saw the series as a young girl and never forgot it.

To be taken to another place and time, another culture and to hear such richness of the English language, no profanity and feel like another era is opened before your eyes is to see and experience true entertainment.

I can't help but compare the quality of these shows to other shows I see.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Tallulah Morehead 06:11 PM on 4/06/2010
377 Fans



I have to agree with most of what Cat MacKinnon says here.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 12:40 AM on 4/07/2010
59 Fans



Thanks for commenting. It's a landmark show and not just for Holmes buffs. One of the best.

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HUFFPOST COMMUNITY MODERATOR

rich3324 01:43 PM on 4/05/2010
156 Fans



The Jeremy Brett Sherlock Holmes has set the standard for the series. Another entertaining detective series was Cracker starring Robby Coltrane.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Michael Giltz 11:00 PM on 4/05/2010
59 Fans



Oh definitely, Cracker is a very good series -- the UK version.

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engchina 10:48 PM on 4/04/2010

189 Fans



I suppose if you are under 30 or raised on MTV then Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes serves as a good Big Mac. ...simply instant gratification with no lingering satisfaction... Ritchie's Holmes played by Robert Downey Jr is more Batman ,while his sidekick Watson played by Jude Law is more Robin.Both men are good actors ,(Downey can be great ..see Charlie Chaplin). Digitally enhanced photoshopped pics of Victorian London also ruin this picture .it is simply awful. I propose a legal restraining order to prevent Mr Ritchie from ever touching another Holmes script .

I would like to draw your attention to an earlier production of Sherlock Holmes.... A 1965 BBC TV production Holmes is played by Douglas Wilmer.. The re -created scenes of London are neither digitally enhanced or photoshopped... it simply did not exist... excellent scripts and flawless acting. The late Nigel Stock plays Watson, no actor has come close to capturing the core character of Holmes assistant.

The late Jeremy Brett portrays the great detective with deep solace. Brett's Holmes is a sad brewing figure who sometimes seems out of place ,even lost in the frenzied world of Victorian London. Once again no photoshop, no blue screen , no computer animated figures. If you like detective serials where the main character uses his brain instead of a gun to solve crimes you may like the morose sometimes erratic Inspector Morse,(written by Colin Dexter) and his long suffering assistant Sergeant Lewis. Again no photoshop,animated figures or bluescreen. EngChina.

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BlackJAC 11:16 AM on 4/05/2010

439 Fans



Actually, the Guy Ritchie one has more roots in the original source material than other adaptations.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Tallulah Morehead 06:56 PM on 4/05/2010
377 Fans



I keep seeing people say this: "the Guy Ritchie one has more roots in the original source material than other adaptations."

Having had the misfortune to see the Ritchie film in a theater, and having read all the original stories many times each, I can tell you that that is a load of bull.

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engchina 07:11 PM on 4/05/2010

189 Fans



I think Arthur Conan Doyle would be amused

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research 08:23 PM on 4/04/2010

708 Fans



Don't miss "young Sherlock Holmes" and "men who stare at goats"

Fantastic films, far above the rest.

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HUFFPOST BLOGGER

Tallulah Morehead 06:58 PM on 4/05/2010

377 Fans



"below" is not spelled "a - b - o - v - e". Try proofreading before hitting "post."

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research 07:25 PM on 4/05/2010

708 Fans



FAR ABOVE THE REST!!!!

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research 11:24 PM on 4/05/2010

708 Fans



It's a great story, well written, good acting, special effects, You didn't believe all those other Holmes stories were true, did you?

If the critics like I it, I usually don't. Critics are so jaded.

critics LOVED "Eating Raoul". what a stinker!

Goats is just a great absurdest comedy with a lot of truth as well.

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