

Doyle's Favorite Sherlock Holmes Stories

In March of 1927 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle proposed a challenge to readers of the *Strand* magazine, where all his Sherlock Holmes stories originally appeared. Of the first forty-four Sherlock Holmes stories already then published in book form (in four books: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, and *His Last Bow*), Doyle selected the twelve stories that he considered the best and invited readers to do likewise. A prize (£100 and an autographed copy of Doyle's *Memories and Adventures*) was offered to the reader whose list most nearly coincided with Doyle's own choices.

In June, at the close of the competition, Doyle wrote again in the *Strand* to explain "How I Made My List." He began by suggesting that all of his choices had come in for some international acclaim or recognition, then went on to list and justify several selections. He felt certain that "The Speckled Band" — that "grim snake story" — would appear on every list, and he placed it at the top of his own. He ranked "The Red-headed League" and "The Dancing Men" next on the strength of their "originality of plot." Rounding out Doyle's favorite half-dozen were "The Final Problem" (because it "deals with the only foe who ever really extended Holmes" and "deceived the public (and Watson) into the erroneous inference of his death"); "A Scandal in Bohemia" (as the first Holmes story, it "opened the path for the others" and "has more

female interest than is usual"); and "The Empty House" (because it "essays the difficult task of explaining away the alleged death of Holmes" and "introduces such a villain as Col. Sebastian Moran"). Several of his second half-dozen choices, he readily admitted, were somewhat arbitrary; but he named his first six choices confidently.

Here is Doyle's complete list:

- "The Speckled Band"
- "The Red-headed League"
- "The Dancing Men"
- "The Final Problem"
- "A Scandal in Bohemia"
- "The Empty House"

- "The Five Orange Pips"
- "The Second Stain"
- "The Devil's Foot"
- "The Priory School"
- "The Musgrave Ritual"
- "The Reigate Puzzle"