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THEMATIC SECTION

“Come, Watson! The Game is Afoot!”

Sherlock Holmes: An Adventure in Videogames

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ABSTRACT: One of the most famous fictional characters in crime fiction, Sherlock Holmes, made his debut in 1887 in the detective story *A Study in Scarlet*. Since then, the detective, created by the British writer and physician Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), has been portrayed in multiple formats worldwide, including video games.

In the first part of this article, I will examine the sociocultural context of the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras, which aligns with the timeline of the Sherlock Holmes canon. The following section provides an overview of video games centred on the character of Sherlock Holmes. Since 1984, Holmes has been adapted across myriad gaming platforms, beginning with Beam Software’s text-based adventure *Sherlock* for the Spectrum and Commodore, and continuing to 2025 with *The Beekeeper’s Picnic: A Sherlockian Adventure* for PC,

RESUMO: Uma das personagens fictícias mais emblemáticas da literatura policial, Sherlock Holmes surgiu pela primeira vez em 1887, no romance *A Study in Scarlet*. Desde então, o detective criado pelo escritor e médico britânico Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) tem sido constantemente representado nos mais diversos meios de comunicação, a nível global, incluindo o universo dos videojogos.

Na primeira parte deste artigo, será analisado o contexto sociocultural do final da Era Vitoriana e do início da Era Eduardiana, períodos que coincidem com o arco temporal do cânone original sherlockiano. A secção seguinte apresenta uma visão geral dos videojogos centrados na personagem de Sherlock Holmes. Desde 1984, Sherlock Holmes tem sido adaptado para diversas plataformas de videojogos, desde a aventura textual *Sherlock*, da Beam Software, aos sistemas Spectrum e

developed by Afoot Games. This article aims to explore how Sherlock Holmes has influenced the video game industry and evolved to meet the challenges of adaptation as an iconic character who has transcended both time and space.

KEYWORDS: Sherlock Holmes, Victorian era, Crime Fiction, Videogames, Mythmaking.

Commodore, e prolongando-se até 2025 com *The Beekeeper's Picnic: A Sherlockian Adventure*, para PC, do estúdio Afoot Games.

O presente artigo propõe-se a examinar como a personagem Sherlock Holmes influenciou a indústria dos videogames, analisando os mecanismos que sustentam a sua reinvenção narrativa. Sherlock Holmes, enquanto entidade ficcional sujeita a um processo de mitopoesia, representa um caso de intermedialidade, cuja relevância ultrapassa fronteiras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Sherlock Holmes, Era Vitoriana, Literatura Policial, Videogames, Mitopoesia.

The character of Sherlock Holmes first emerged during the late Victorian era (c. 1870 to 1901, the final decades of Queen Victoria's reign). This period was marked by significant industrial expansion, social disparities, and the consolidation of the British Empire. During Queen Victoria's reign, Britain's imperial reach extended across multiple continents – from North America to Africa, Asia, Oceania – driven by territorial ambitions. Consequently, these territorial acquisitions were accompanied by a zealous desire to explore areas perceived as foreign or primitive, fostering a distorted sense of duty to “civilize” them. Furthermore, as a result of this expansion, London became the centre of international finance and trade. This growth underscored London's position as a dominant global force, and its influence on economic, cultural, and political affairs during this era was unmatched by that of any other city (Marx and Charlot 1995). As the capital of a vast empire, London attracted migrants and immigrants alike, all seeking a better life. The city of London became an overpopulated melting pot: “(...) in 1800 London's population had been around a million. By 1881 it had soared to 4.5 million, and by 1911 to over 7 million” (Porter 1995, 205). Thus, as the city grew more prosperous, many inhabitants found themselves laboring under grueling conditions, which they were forced to endure in overcrowded slums. These living conditions contributed to a dramatic rise in both criminal activity and social problems, including prostitution, opium dens, and wretched children. London became a city of disparities: on one hand, the West End, a symbol of privilege; on the other, the East End, characterized by poverty. This social disparity persisted throughout the Edwardian age, which lasted from the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, under the reigns of both King Edward VII and King George V. Additionally, Victorian London was a microcosm of broader cultural tensions that defined the era. The period was marked by a profound dichotomy between tradition and innovation. Although traditional religious values and conservative social norms remained deeply rooted, they were progressively challenged by scientific advancements and progressive thought. The publication of Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) groundbreaking book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favorite Races in the Struggle for Life*, in 1859, which argued that human existence is the result of a long biological process rather than divine design, unsettled a society caught between two

70 opposing vectors: science and religion. From this point onward, the unique nature of humanity – traditionally understood as divinely ordained creatures – came into doubt, and the concept of “the double”¹ emerged (Furtado 1987). Robert Louis Stevenson’s (1850-1894) *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde’s (1854-1900) *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Bram Stoker’s (1847-1912) *Dracula* (1897) are prime examples of Victorian anxieties concerning alterity (Terenas 2018), the fear of the Other, and the decline of the gentleman epitome. The figure of the Victorian gentleman became established as a cultural symbol, inspired by principles of honor and morality associated with medieval chivalry, serving as a model of conduct for the rising middle class. The gentleman represented an idealized version, embodying a set of qualities that reflected the image the upper strata of the middle class wished to project. In this sense, Holmes epitomizes the Victorian mindset: the concept of alterity, maintaining a public identity as a groundbreaking detective while keeping a private side that is introspective, mysterious, and reliant on drugs, which he claims stimulate the mind. This duality is not merely incidental; it reflects the broader Victorian preoccupation with the contrast between public persona and private reality. In the stories, Sherlock Holmes possesses unique knowledge and skills unmatched in his field. This renders him an invaluable asset to Scotland Yard, which occasionally seeks his guidance, as Holmes himself asserts: “I suppose I am the only one in the world. I’m a consulting detective. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent” (Doyle 1989, 17).

This statement not only highlights the uniqueness of his profession but also underscores the respect and reliance he commands within the investigative community. Holmes is not merely a solver of mysteries; he is a restorer of social justice, someone who rebalances society. Within this framework, Holmes emerges as a Victorian superhero, his actions evoking the revival of chivalric ideals (Klein 2002), highly fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century, such as honor, courtesy, and bravery. Furthermore, he exemplifies the traits of a true gentleman, as defined by Smiles, presenting himself as “honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping” (Smiles 1859, 328). Through his conduct, ethical code, and professional expertise, Holmes not only solves crimes but also emerges as both a product and a model of the Victorian gentleman ideal.

In 1887, with the publication of *A Study in Scarlet* in “Beeton’s Christmas Annual”, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first presented Sherlock Holmes, a character who would assume a prominent place not only in literature but also in film, television, and video games. The enduring popularity of Holmes is no mere accident; rather, it reflects the public’s fascination with narratives that blend the excitement of mystery with a sense of verisimilitude. Readers see themselves reflected in Holmes, the consulting detective, as well as in Watson, the physician and chronicler. This dynamic partnership, akin to a superhero duo, functions as a narrative magnet, drawing the reader into the detective’s adventures. From the outset, Doyle’s stories were accompanied by illustrations that enhanced both the atmosphere and the accessibility of the narratives (see Figure 1). These images did not serve as mere embellishments; instead, they complemented the text, providing readers with visual cues that deepened their immersion in Holmes’s world. The interplay between text and image was particularly significant in the late nineteenth century, as these illustrations often served as readers’ first visual encounter with the fictional detective.



Figure 1. Sidney Paget. *The Adventure of the Silver Blaze*, “The Strand Magazine”. December 1892, p. 646.²

In the Sherlockian canon, the interrelation between text and image has been evident from the beginning; the visual representation of Sherlock Holmes provides an additional

72 dimension to the narrative, enhancing the character's realism in the reader's perception. Thus, the construction of the character occurs both within the stories and in the collective imagination through this combination of materiality and visuality. Today, the image associated with the fictional detective differs greatly from the earliest illustrations featuring Holmes. The British illustrator David Henry Friston (1820–1906) created four illustrations to accompany the first story. These illustrations depict elements related to Holmes, such as the bowler hat and moustache. However, today only the cloak and magnifying glass remain associated with the character. Notably, the magnifying glass symbolizes both the character and the period. The association with this object has become an enduring symbol, reflecting the Victorian belief in scientific observation, as noted by Christopher Pittard:

The iconic image of Holmes with a magnifying glass (sparingly used in Doyle's texts) exemplifies a wider trend in late Victorian detective fiction equating the detective with the supposed mechanical objectivity of the camera lens (Pittard 2019, 141).

The evolution of Holmes's visual identity owes much to the work of the British illustrator Sidney Paget (1860-1908), whose illustrations redefined the detective's appearance. Paget's depiction introduced the deerstalker hat and imbued the artwork with a dramatic flair that heightened the stories' emotional resonance. His contributions extended beyond mere portraiture; by strategically placing illustrations throughout the narratives, Paget established a visual rhythm reminiscent of what we now recognize in contemporary graphic novels. This form of sequential art anticipated later developments, demonstrating how integrating text and image can enhance narrative complexity and reader engagement. Hence, Paget not only defined Holmes's physical traits and iconic character but also introduced a sequential art style recognized in graphic novels. Thus, the construction of Sherlock Holmes as a cultural icon has always depended upon the synergy between written and visual representation. From the earliest Holmes stories to modern digital adaptations, the character's identity has been shaped by the interplay of narrative, illustration, and evolving audience expectations. The contemporary image of Holmes – so distinct from Friston's original conception – attests to the enduring influence of visual storytelling in literature.

3.1. Early Text-Based Adaptations (1984–1986)

Sherlock Holmes's video game genesis dates back to 1984. The game, simply titled *Sherlock* (see Figure 2), was developed by Philip Mitchell at Beam Software, which was then a subsidiary of Melbourne House in Australia. Designed for the ZX Spectrum 48K, this game set an early standard, paving the way for future adaptations of the literary character into an interactive format. *Sherlock* is a text-based adventure game (an interactive experience in which gameplay is primarily conveyed through written language) structured for single-player participation, immersing the user in the role of Holmes. The player is tasked with investigating a double murder that has taken place in Leatherhead, Surrey. This narrative-driven format not only stimulates the player's deductive reasoning skills but also presents a significant degree of interactivity.



Fig. 2 “Sherlock”. Philip Mitchell, Beam Software, 1984, screenshot.

That same year, the American publisher Bantam Software released *Sherlock Holmes: Another Bow* for the Commodore 64. Like its predecessor, this game was a single-player, text-driven adventure, although it incorporated visual illustrations displayed above the narrative text. The gameplay features time constraints, requiring the player to act more efficiently. The player once again assumes the persona of Sherlock Holmes, who finds himself embroiled in a complex murder investigation aboard the steamship *Destiny*. The narrative setting is particularly intriguing, evoking the enclosed, intense atmosphere characteristic of classic detective fiction. What sets this game apart is its inclusion of real historical figures such as the inventor Thomas Edison, artist Pablo Picasso, and illusionist

Harry Houdini. These figures are not merely background characters; they are interactive, providing opportunities for observation and interrogation. This blend of fictional and historical elements enriches the narrative, encouraging players to make connections with cultural and scientific contexts. The inclusion of illustrations enhances the immersive experience, allowing a vivid visualization of scenes and characters. In 1986, the United States-based company Ellicott Creek Software released a text-based game titled *Sherlock Holmes: The Vatican Cameos* for the PC (MS-DOS) and Apple II platforms. The game's title derives directly from a subtle narrative reference within Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's crime novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, published in 1902:

I had observed some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied by that little affair of the Vatican cameos, and in my anxiety to oblige the Pope I lost touch with several interesting English cases (Doyle 1989, 457).

By centering their game around this detail, the developers not only pay homage to Doyle's Sherlockian literary legacy but also sharpen the players' curiosity to explore a story within the Sherlockian canon. In the same year, the United States-based company Sculptured Software released a video game adaptation of the board game *221B Baker Street* for platforms such as the Commodore 64/128, IBM PC, Apple II, and both the Atari 8-bit and ST systems. This graphic mystery adventure sought to digitally recreate the intrigue and deductive challenges of its analogue predecessor. The title alludes to Sherlock Holmes's residence on Baker Street. *221B Baker Street* supported both single-player and multiplayer modes (up to four participants). Within the game, players could assume the roles of four iconic characters from the Sherlockian canon: Sherlock Holmes, Dr John Watson, Inspector Lestrade, and Irene Adler. Set in Victorian London, the game presented thirty distinct cases, each demanding investigation, analytical thinking, and deductive reasoning. As players roamed across a virtual London, they assumed investigative roles. Players had to collect clues, question suspects, and gather evidence. The primary goal was to solve the mystery and return to Baker Street with the correct resolution. The game honors its board game heritage³ while serving as a digital portal to the immersive world of Sherlock Holmes, offering a structured and stimulating environment for players.

3.2. Expansion and Illustration (1987–1988)

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Sherlock: The Riddle of The Crown Jewels was released in 1987 by the United States-based company Challenge, Inc., and made available on platforms, such as PC (MS-DOS), Commodore 64, Amiga, Macintosh, and Apple II. This game belongs to the single-player text-adventure video game genre. The narrative is set in 1887, coinciding with the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria. The story opens with Sherlock Holmes engaged in his morning routine of reading the newspaper. He notices an announcement stating that the Tower of London has been closed to the public due to unspecified security concerns. This unexpected closure during such a major national event arouses Holmes's suspicion. Soon after, Holmes is approached with a request to investigate the theft of the Crown Jewels. Sensing the possibility of a setup, Holmes chooses not to undertake the investigation himself; instead, he assigns the task to Dr John Watson. This narrative choice shifts the game's perspective, placing the player in the role of Watson rather than Holmes. As Watson, the player is responsible for questioning potential suspects and conducting investigations across several of London's historical and cultural landmarks, such as Big Ben, Madame Tussauds, and Westminster Abbey. Although the game is inspired by Doyle's principal Sherlockian literary characters, it does not directly adapt any of Doyle's original stories. Instead, it combines fiction with the factual event of the 1887 Golden Jubilee, which took place on 20th and 21st June that year. This integration of fiction and historical reality creates a factual narrative within the game. Moreover, it not only pays homage to Sherlockian literary origins but also offers an immersive experience at the intersection of history, literature, and digital culture. Three video games were released in 1988, each inspired by the character of Holmes. The first of these, *Sherlock Holmes: A Matter of Evil*, was developed by David Court of the United Kingdom-based studio Creative Juices. This title, released specifically for the ZX Spectrum 128K, is a text-based adventure created using the Professional Adventure Writer (PAW) software, a tool particularly popular among interactive fiction creators of that era. The same year marked the release of *The Raven*, developed collaboratively by Alan Bolger and Stephen Kee of 8th Day Software, a United Kingdom-based company. Much like its predecessor, *The Raven* was designed for the ZX Spectrum 128K and utilized the PAW software. However, it distinguished itself by incorporating hand-drawn illustrations above the textual narrative. This approach combined visual and literary storytelling, offering players a more immersive experience

than text-based formats could. Set in 1893, *The Raven* places Holmes within a narrative that begins with an invitation from Professor Vybes, who intends to demonstrate innovative methods for treating the criminally insane. The narrative swiftly transitions into a murder mystery upon Holmes's arrival at the manor, compelling the player, who assumes Holmes's role, to investigate the crime while contending with threats to their personal safety. This structure not only reinforces the conventions of detective fiction but also highlights the interactive potential of video games as a medium for immersive storytelling. According to a review in *Crash* magazine, "*The Raven* is extremely sophisticated and brings together all the humorous and horrible elements of the 19th century" ("Adventure Trail: *The Raven*" 1988). The third title from that year is *The Case of the Beheaded Smuggler*, authored by Kez Gray and Patrick Walsh and published by Mental Images, another United Kingdom-based company. This game, designed for the ZX Spectrum 48K, adopts a text-based format. Set in Victorian London, the game has the player assume the role of Sherlock Holmes. The player's task is to solve the mystery by identifying the murder weapon, discerning the motive, and ultimately exposing the perpetrator. The game's design focuses on deduction and narrative engagement, which aligns with the enduring appeal of Holmes as a character associated with intellectual rigor and methodical investigation. Collectively, these three titles employ similar technological platforms – the ZX Spectrum and PAW software – and each narrative demonstrates the complexity of Holmes's fictional universe and its capacity to engage players in problem-solving stories.

3.3. Multimedia Innovation (1990–1996)

In the 1990s, four Sherlock Holmes-themed video games were released. The first title, *Sherlock Holmes: The Lamberley Mystery*, is a text-driven adventure developed by the British author Ian Eveleigh and released by the United Kingdom-based Zenobi Software for the ZX Spectrum 48K. Drawing from Doyle's Sherlockian universe, this interactive narrative is set in 1887. The plot begins at Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes receives a telegram from his brother Mycroft, who requests Sherlock's investigative expertise on behalf of a colleague, Dr Fordham. The gameplay revolves around following narrative cues and solving challenges, emphasizing the player's problem-solving abilities. In 1992, *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Serrated Scalpel* was developed by the North American studio Mythos Software and published by the United States-based

company Electronic Arts for platforms such as the 3DO and IBM PC. This instalment is a single-player graphic adventure, distinguished by its verb-oriented, point-and-click interface. The narrative unfolds in late 1888, centering on an event inspired by the infamous Jack the Ripper murders, one of the most notorious unsolved criminal cases of the nineteenth century. The game not only places the player in the atmospheric Whitechapel district but also draws on the historical anxieties and social realities of the time, thereby enhancing immersion and narrative complexity. The interface itself reflects a broader transition within adventure gaming, moving from textual or command-line interactions to more visual and interactive environments. Next, between 1991 and 1993, *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* was both developed and published for DOS by the United States-based company ICOM Simulations, Inc. This interactive adventure, designed for a single player, comprises three volumes, each presenting a set of distinct cases to unravel. What distinguishes this game from its contemporaries is its innovative use of multimedia technology, specifically its distribution on CD-ROM and integration of live-action video sequences featuring actors Peter Farley as Sherlock Holmes and Warren Green as Dr Watson. This pioneering approach not only enhanced narrative immersion but also anticipated subsequent trends in interactive media, where the boundaries between film and gameplay blend. Furthermore, the game's emphasis on logic-based investigation translates the legacy of Doyle's Sherlockian canon into a digital format. Finally, *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Rose Tattoo*, released in 1996, is another single-player, point-and-click graphic adventure set in Victorian England. This video game, developed by Mythos Software and published by Electronic Arts for the IBM PC, combines visually evocative Victorian-era motifs with a narrative steeped in period authenticity, offering players an immersive digital experience (see Figure 3).



Fig. 3. *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Rose Tattoo*, Mythos Software, 1996, screenshot.

In this interactive narrative, players are invited to assume the perspectives of both Dr Watson and, subsequently, Sherlock Holmes himself, thereby engaging directly with the investigative process and the intricate unraveling of a series of crimes with implications for national security. A distinguishing feature of this title, as with its predecessor, lies in its forward-thinking use of multimedia technology. The developers utilized the then-novel CD-ROM format, which allowed for a more expansive game world, improved audio, and the inclusion of full-motion video sequences – an innovation achieved by filming live actors against a blue screen. This method, while technologically ambitious for its time, lent a unique visual presentation that set it apart from other adventure games of the era. The video game draws heavily upon the enduring literary personas of Holmes and Watson as conceived by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Nevertheless, the game does not adapt any specific storyline from the Sherlockian canon. Instead, it explores entirely new narratives, offering players fresh mysteries while remaining faithful to the spirit and character dynamics. This creative choice reflects a broader trend in the video game industry, in which the Holmesian mythos serves as a basis for inventive storytelling rather than a strict adaptation of the established canon.

3.4. The Frogwares Era and Genre Hybridisation (2002–2010)

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In 2002, the Ukrainian company Frogwares developed and released the video game *Sherlock Holmes: The Mystery of the Mummy* for Microsoft Windows (see Figure 4).



Fig. 4 “*Sherlock Holmes: The Mystery of the Mummy*”, Frogwares, 2002, screenshot.

This release represents another entry in the point-and-click adventure genre. Players are invited into a first-person, single-player investigative experience, assuming the role of Holmes himself as he endeavors to unravel the enigmatic disappearance of the archaeologist Lord Montcalfe. The unexpected success of the game not only validated Frogwares’ creative direction but also laid the foundation for an enduring series of Sherlock Holmes adventure games, comprising 10 main titles. The series’ inception is thus emblematic of both the resilience of the Sherlock Holmes character in new media and gamers’ craving for stimulating content. Therefore, Frogwares released the second instalment, *Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Silver Earring*, in 2004 for Microsoft Windows. The title was distributed in Europe by the British publisher Digital Jester and in the United States by Ubisoft. Set in 1897, the game introduced an innovation: players could alternate between the roles of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, thereby enriching the investigative process and allowing for a more exquisite exploration of narrative events. The central mystery, an intricate series of murders occurring during a birthday celebration, provided a layered narrative structure that demanded analysis and deductive reasoning. By 2006, Frogwares had developed and published *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened* for Windows, the third entry in the series. This title marked a significant departure from previous instalments by merging the rational world of Doyle’s detective fiction with the

80 supernatural horror of H. P. Lovecraft. Holmes and Watson were then confronted with an organization that venerated the ancient deity Cthulhu. This symbiosis of genres not only expanded the series' thematic range but also illustrated Holmes' adaptability across a variety of narrative contexts. The following year, in 2007, Frogwares continued to experiment with intertextuality by releasing *Sherlock Holmes: Nemesis* (known in France as *Sherlock Holmes versus Arsène Lupin*). This fourth instalment, for Windows, brought together the worlds of Doyle and Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941), pitting Holmes and Watson against the legendary French thief Arsène Lupin. The narrative structure, set in Victorian London, adopted a "cat-and-mouse" dynamic, as Holmes and Watson try to stop Lupin from stealing artefacts from institutions such as the National Gallery and the British Museum. The inclusion of hidden-object gameplay elements alongside traditional point-and-click mechanics signaled a desire to innovate within the established adventure format. In 2009, the series confronted one of the most infamous figures in true-crime history in *Sherlock Holmes versus Jack the Ripper*, released for both Microsoft Windows and Xbox 360. Set in late Victorian London, the game placed players in the roles of either Holmes or Watson as they sought to reconstruct the sequence of events surrounding the notorious Whitechapel murders. The first-person perspective was maintained, offering an immersive investigative experience that required players to meticulously examine crime scenes and synthesize evidence in pursuit of the serial killer. This instalment further underscored Frogwares' commitment to historical authenticity, narrative complexity, and the continuous reinvention of Holmes's character within interactive media. In the same year that Warner Bros. released *Sherlock Holmes: The Game Is Afoot!*, the company also produced and launched *Sherlock Holmes Mysteries* for the iPad, thereby demonstrating a clear recognition of the growing significance of mobile gaming platforms in the early 2010s. This particular title places the player in the role of Sherlock Holmes, whose objective is to exonerate a person convicted of murder. In 2010, Frogwares released *Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Osborne House*, the sixth entry in their ongoing series. This video game was the first designed for the Nintendo DS, utilizing the platform's unique hardware features such as the stylus and touch screen. The result was a point-and-click adventure that emphasized puzzle-solving and code-breaking, thereby aligning with the cognitive challenges characteristic of the Sherlockian canon while also appealing to the Nintendo DS's younger, puzzle-oriented demographic. Additionally, in 2010, Ukrainian

studio Waterlily Games contributed to the Holmes gaming franchise with *Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Baskervilles*. The game's mechanics centered on the search for clues and the assembly of evidence. By 2012, Frogwares continued to expand the Holmes universe with *Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of the Frozen City*, developed for the Nintendo 3DS. In this title, the narrative places Holmes in the midst of a mysterious snowstorm that has frozen the Thames River, a scenario that not only provides dramatic nuance but also introduces unique puzzles to the platform. Following *Sherlock Holmes versus Jack the Ripper*, Frogwares developed and released *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes*, the sixth mainline entry in their series, available for Microsoft Windows, Nintendo Switch, Xbox, and PlayStation 3 and 4. This single-player, third-person adventure places players in the role of Holmes, requiring them to scrutinize evidence and employ deductive reasoning to prove their own innocence in a murder case.

3.5. Mobile Expansions and Revival (2014–2025)

In 2014, the Australian digital studio The Project Factory developed and published *Sherlock: The Network*, a mobile application for iOS and Android platforms inspired by the contemporary BBC television series *Sherlock*. This title reimagines the Baker Street Irregulars – the group of streetwise informants from the original stories – as a digital network of collaborators assisting Holmes in his investigations. The hidden-object game format, combined with the narrative framing of multiple concurrent cases, reflects both the episodic structure of the television adaptation and the interactive nature of modern mobile gaming. That same year, Frogwares released *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 3 and 4, Xbox One, and Xbox 360. As the seventh entry in their series, the title explicitly echoes Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866).⁴ The game's structure allows for ten distinct endings, each shaped by the player's cumulative choices. The player is tasked with resolving six individual cases, meaning that every decision influences the narrative's progression. In 2016, Frogwares continued the Sherlock Holmes video game series with *Sherlock Holmes: The Devil's Daughter*, developed for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One. This instalment blends traditional investigative gameplay with an alternative exploration of Holmes's family history. The inclusion of five different cases, each shaped by the player's interpretive decisions, reinforces the series' commitment to branching narratives and

replayability. By 2021, Frogwares expanded the series with *Sherlock Holmes: Chapter One* for Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One. Uniquely, this title presents a younger Holmes investigating the circumstances surrounding his mother's death, thus providing both a psychological depth and an origin story absent from earlier iterations. In 2022, the Melbourne-based studio Escape Pod Games released *Detective Tales: A Study in Scarlet* for Microsoft Windows, drawing inspiration from Doyle's original 1887 novel. This co-op, point-and-click adventure game is specifically designed for two players, with one embodying Holmes and the other Dr Watson. By requiring collaborative problem-solving, the title not only reinforces the partnership between Holmes and Watson – a core element of the original Sherlockian canon – but also enhances gameplay dynamics that align with the increasing popularity of cooperative gaming experiences. In 2023, Frogwares released the tenth entry in their Holmes series: a remake of the 2007 classic *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened*, featuring updated graphics and enhanced gameplay. It was launched on Microsoft Windows, Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 4 and 5, Xbox One, and Series X/S. In March 2025, Afoot Games launched an interactive point-and-click experience for Microsoft Windows titled *The Beekeeper's Picnic: A Sherlockian Adventure*. Drawing direct inspiration from a segment of Arthur Conan Doyle's 1917 story *His Last Bow*, which portrays the detective's retirement, where he is presented as living in relative seclusion, devoting himself to apiculture and scholarly study:

“But you have retired, Holmes. We heard of you as living the life of a hermit among your bees and your books in a small farm upon the South Downs.” – “Exactly, Watson. Here is the fruit of my leisure ease, the *magnum opus* of my later years!” He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, *Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen*. (Doyle 1989, 964)

Players assume the role of a retired Sherlock Holmes (as depicted in Figure 5), who now resides in Sussex and has devoted himself to beekeeping activities.



Fig. 5 “The Beekeeper's Picnic - A Sherlockian Adventure”, Afoot Games, 2025, screenshot.

Within this narrative framework, Holmes’s retirement is quickly disrupted while he arranges a picnic for his longtime companion, Dr Watson. Holmes soon becomes embroiled in a series of enigmatic cases. The game leverages these scenarios not only as an homage to Doyle’s final portrayal of Holmes but also as a mechanism to intertwine narrative depth with classic gameplay elements. Significantly, *The Beekeeper’s Picnic* does more than simply adapt the original story; it consciously pays tribute to the early era of digital gaming. By employing pixelated graphics and point-and-click mechanics, the developers evoke the early aesthetics and interactivity of adventure games, blending literary storytelling with the nostalgia of retro-video-game design. In this way, the adaptation honors both Doyle’s Sherlockian canon and the roots of the gaming industry, inviting gamers to experience Holmes’s world through a retro-inspired digital video game.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the character of Sherlock Holmes was first introduced by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887, during the Victorian era, a period characterized by a duality between rigid religious and social values and significant scientific advancements. Holmes embodies gentlemanly ideals and heroic qualities, restoring society’s balance through his methodical investigations and the subsequent resolution of criminal cases. Additionally, Holmes has transcended his nineteenth-century literary origins to emerge as a timeless figure within the ever-shifting complexity of global popular culture, including film and video games. The portrayal of Holmes in digital media has developed alongside advancements in gaming

technology. Early iterations, on fourth-generation consoles, such as the ZX Spectrum during the 1980s, relied on text-based adaptations. By the 2020s, with the emergence of ninth-generation consoles, adaptations showcased 3D graphics, reflecting a transformation in both the medium and the character. This progression highlights how depictions of Holmes have adapted in tandem with technological innovation in gaming. Furthermore, those initial incursions into digital storytelling, though limited by the technology of their time, continue to evoke nostalgia and hold enduring appeal for retro gaming enthusiasts, as evidenced by the 2025 release of *The Beekeeper's Picnic: A Sherlockian Adventure*. Thus, the evolution of video games not only demonstrates Holmes's adaptability as a character but also underscores the nostalgic appeal of earlier gaming eras, drawing a direct line from the simplicity of 8-bit visuals to the complexity of modern digital worlds with sophisticated 3D graphics and immersive mechanics. Video game adaptations of Holmes have achieved more than merely preserving the core attributes of Doyle's original creation. They have actively expanded the boundaries of the Sherlockian universe, inviting players to assume the roles of Holmes, Watson, and occasionally other figures within the narrative canon. These interactive experiences often diverge from canonical material, presenting alternative storylines and challenges. In doing so, they offer players a deeper connection to the world and methods of Sherlock Holmes, the consulting detective. Notably, most of these games draw inspiration from Doyle's characters and the unique atmosphere of Victorian London, yet they innovate by diverging from traditional narratives and introducing fresh perspectives. This willingness to reinterpret the Holmes mythos illustrates the character's enduring relevance. In addition, Sherlock Holmes's presence in video games attests to the public's ongoing fascination with criminal investigation, deductive reasoning, and logical analysis. As technological advancements continue to reshape the possibilities of interactive storytelling, even more immersive and innovative Sherlockian video game experiences are expected. Like Holmes himself, the game is destined to remain perpetually afoot, ensuring that Doyle's legendary detective will continue to captivate audiences for generations to come.

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Interactive Games and Software

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¹ The motif of “the double” is a pervasive cultural and literary theme that extends back to Antiquity, functioning as a symbol of duality, ambivalence, and the tension between self and other, emphasizing the double as an externalized projection of internal anxieties, fears, or desires, thereby bridging literary, cultural, and psychological interpretations of the motif. In classical mythology, figures such as Narcissus or Castor and Pollux illustrate early manifestations of mirrored selves and dual identities. Philosophical and literary traditions further elaborated the concept: in Plato’s dialogues, the tension between appearance and reality can be interpreted as an early form of self-division. The theme persisted in medieval and Renaissance literature, often associated with moral or spiritual reflection, appearing in tales such as the medieval *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 14th century), where characters confront mirrored or symbolic counterparts, and in Renaissance works like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600) and *Macbeth* (1606) (Botoso 2021), which explore psychological duality. The doppelgänger evolved into a central theme in Romantic and Gothic literature, continuing into the Victorian era, where it frequently explores psychological duality, identity, and the tension between public and private selves.

² Image source: https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php/The_Adventure_of_Silver_Blaze.

³ Board game adaptations of Sherlock Holmes gained wider visibility in the late twentieth century, beginning with *221B Baker Street: The Master Detective Game* (1975) [Byrne 2016], which employed competitive case-solving mechanics grounded in Sherlockian deduction, followed by *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* (1982) and its subsequent expansions, which shifted the emphasis toward narrative interpretation and an immersive, text-based investigative experience playable in single-player or cooperative modes (Shashko 2018).

⁴ The intertextual dialogue between the game and the Dostoevsky novel is reflected in its engagement with themes of moral responsibility, ethical deliberation, and the psychological consequences of transgression. Frogwares’ transposes the Dostoevskian literary explorations of guilt and conscience into participatory decision-making within a digital framework.

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