

Better Holmes and Watson

The Granada Series Reviewed

The Dancing Men
Adaptation: Anthony Skene
Direction: John Bruce

In the hushed hour of dawn, a restless and emotionally charged Sherlock Holmes is awakened by a sharp knock at the door of 221B Baker Street. At last an all-important telegram, the vital link in a chain of evidence Holmes has painstakingly fashioned for a client, has arrived from Chicago! But no, it's not the telegram after all; it's another letter from the client himself. Holmes opens the envelope to find the latest in a series of coded messages that the Great Detective has endeavored to decipher for Hilton Cubitt. (The messages, composed of bizarre dancing stick figures, have filled Cubitt's wife, Elsie, with dread.) On a blackboard set up in the Baker Street sitting room, Holmes deftly translates the stick figures he's already decoded. Suddenly, Holmes and Dr. Watson are galvanized into action; exchanging hurried glances, the pair race from the room to prepare for a journey. The camera circles the blackboard to reveal a grim warning: ELSIE _RE_ ARE TO MEET

THEY GO_. It's an electric moment, one of the best in the entire Granada TV series, and it sparks one of the finest episodes: THE DANCING MEN.

Canonically speaking, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" comes fairly late in the career of the world's first consulting detective. Written in 1903, it's the third of 13 tales in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, and it helps give the lie to that oft-quoted infamy that Holmes was "never quite the same man" after the incident at the Reichenbach Falls. Surprisingly, Granada saw fit to make THE DANCING MEN the second episode of their series. It seems an odd choice, not because of the original's placement within the Canon, but rather because, to a very great extent, Holmes fails in his commission. (With THE DANCING MEN coming hard on the womanly heels of A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA, Holmes, in the course of two episodes, is either outwitted by, or manages at best a Pyrrhic victory over, his adversaries.)

Dramatist Anthony Skene makes failure especially galling to the Great Detective by presenting Holmes at his most arrogant in the early scenes of the story.



THE DANCING MEN appear again to vex country squire Hilton Cubitt (Tenniel Evans) in Granada's superb production of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story.

© Granada Television of England



Jeremy Brett

Holmes lords it over his companion when, seemingly out of thin air, he announces that Watson does not "propose to invest in South African securities" and then shows how he came to this conclusion by inspecting the groove between the good doctor's left forefinger and thumb. Next, Holmes is insufferably rude to Hilton Cubitt during the latter's two visits to Baker Street. Later, learning that Cubitt's been killed, Holmes clings to his battered pride as a drowning man to a log: he's cold to Inspector Martin and inconsiderate while questioning the grief-stricken cook, Mrs. King (at least until Watson gently suggests that the poor woman be asked to sit). As is so often the case, it's the doctor who arouses the detective's better nature—with the result that, late in the story, Holmes takes it upon himself to offer some brief, comforting words to Mrs. King.

There's more interplay between Holmes and Watson here than in the preceding SCANDAL, and Jeremy Brett and David Burke rise to the challenge with admirable skill. Tenniel Evans and Betsy Brantley are touching as the unhappy Cubitts, and Wendy Jane Walker, with only a few lines of dialogue, brings the servant girl, Saunders, sharply to life. If THE DANCING MEN has a flaw, it's in the less-than-able emoting of Eugene Lipinski as the villainous Abe Slaney; luckily, the performance is confined to a single scene and causes no great harm.

© Granada Television of England

