



## 2020 Baker Street Almanac

### A Supplement

Here are a few questions and answers about this year's *Baker Street Almanac*.

**Question #1:** I have the *Almanac*. It arrived with a dust jacket/wrapper that is creased or wrinkled or torn. May I have a replacement dust jacket/wrapper so that my *Almanac* will be complete and unspoiled?

**Short answer #1:** Glad to hear it! Yes, on one condition: that you send us a completed *Almanac* survey card.

**Longer answer #1:** We are seeking to build an interactive relationship with our readers. It started last year, with the print edition of the 2019 *Almanac*, which had two reader-participation features. First, there was a survey card in a pocket in the back of the *Almanac*. Readers who completed the survey card (that is, gave short, substantive answers to our questions) and returned it to us received from us five items (yes, five!) by return mail: (1) the completed survey card they sent us (we scanned it for our own use), (2) a fresh, unmarked survey card (for readers with completionist tendencies), (3) a crisp, clean, neatly folded copy of the “How Watson Learned the Trick” map that was the dust jacket for the *Almanac* that year (and which tended to get creased or wrinkled or torn while serving as a dust jacket), and (4 & 5) our reproductions of a couple of old Sherlockian trading cards. Second, there was a coded puzzle, which started at the ribbons with which the *Almanac* and its dust jacket were sealed. We won't bore you with the details of what a code-breaker/puzzle-solver achieved or received. Please do not waste any time trying to participate in either of the 2019 *Almanac* reader adventures. Their time has passed.

This year's *Almanac*, the 2020 edition, also has two reader-participation features. The first involves, again, a survey card in a pocket in the back of the *Almanac*. Readers who complete the survey card (that is, give short, substantive answers to our questions) and return it to us will receive from us three items (and maybe more) by return mail: (1) their completed survey card (we are again scanning them for our own use), (2) a fresh, unmarked survey card (for the completionists), and (3) a crisp, clean, neatly folded copy of the dust jacket/wrapper that encases this year's *Almanac* (it is an enlarged reproduction of an original Sidney Paget illustration for “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,” from the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at the Toronto Public Library — thank you TPL!).

And it is at this point that the discerning reader appreciates our plan. The Paget dust jacket/wrapper is fragile (the paper is good enough to take ink well, but thin enough to break down a bit under the rugged conditions to which dust jackets/wrappers are often subject), and it has been treated roughly by the callous editor who wrapped it round the *Almanac*, and perhaps also by the difficult conditions under which many packages travel. In short, the dust jacket/wrapper has been designed and treated so as to be

interesting but imperfect (creased or wrinkled or torn or what have you, sort of like those “distressed” jeans that are so fashionable nowadays) when it arrives in a reader’s hands, in order to inspire readers to complete and return the survey card in the pocket in the back of the *Almanac*. This approach will not work with everyone, of course. Some readers will both (a) not be troubled by an interesting but imperfect dust jacket/wrapper, and (b) not be inclined to complete and return a survey in any event. But that’s OK — we are still happy that they are reading the *Almanac*.

For a few words on the second reader participation opportunity in the 2020 *Almanac*, please see our answers to Question #2.

**Question #2:** I could not untie the knot in the string tied around the dust jacket/wrapper. So, I had to cut the string. May I have a replacement piece of string so that my *Almanac* will be complete and unspoiled?

**Short answer #2:** No, for a reason you will like, we expect. **Longer answer #2:** Again, we are seeking to build an interactive relationship with our readers. Your cutting of the string was your contribution to the completion of the *Almanac*. The *Almanac* always has covered and always will cover many Sherlockian and Doylean topics, but each edition will also have a few special topics on which it bestows extra attention. One of those topics in the 2020 edition is “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,” which includes this exchange between Holmes and Lestrade:

Lestrade went in and brought out a yellow cardboard box, with a piece of brown paper and some string. There was a bench at the edge of the path, and we all sat down while Holmes examined, one by one, the articles which Lestrade had handed to him.

“The string is exceedingly interesting,” he remarked, holding it up to the light and sniffing at it. “What do you make of this string, Lestrade?”

“It has been tarred.”

“Precisely. It is a piece of tarred twine. You have also, no doubt, remarked that Miss Cushing has cut the cord with a scissors, as can be seen by the double fray on each side. This is of importance.”

“I cannot see the importance,” said Lestrade.

“The importance lies in the fact that the knot is left intact, and that this knot is of a peculiar character.”

“It is very neatly tied. I had already made a note to that effect,” said Lestrade, complacently.

“So much for the string then,” said Holmes, smiling . . .

And there you have it: The string was cut before Holmes ever saw it, and the fact that it was cut was important to his work on the case. String associated with “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box” *should* be cut. You were *supposed* to cut the string. We *wanted* you to. A “Cardboard Box”-themed 2020 *Almanac* tied with an uncut piece of string is not yet complete. So, if you have not yet cut the string, please do!

**Question #3:** May I have a dust jacket/wrapper?

**Short answer #3:** No. **Longer answer #3:** We are happy that people like the *Almanac*, and we are even happy that people read it online (for free). We are also happy that people like the *Almanac*’s dust jacket/wrapper. But, alas, we cannot afford to give away everything. Only paying customers get the dust jacket/wrapper (and they — as our answers to Question #1 explain — have to work as well as pay if they want to get a crisp, clean, and neatly folded one!).