
SHERLOCK HOLMES AND CHATGPT

In the familiar sitting room at 221B Baker Street, Sherlock Holmes reclined in his armchair, his piercing gaze fixed upon me with an intensity that bespoke of a mind at work. His pipe smouldered in his hand, the pungent blue clouds of his disgusting tobacco swirled above his head, the Persian slipper in which he keeps his tobacco and the skull in which he keeps his syringe were on the mantelpiece, his violin lay on the sofa.

I was checking that all the props were in place for a new story – pipe, tobacco, cocaine, violin – when Holmes suddenly spoke:

“Tell me, Watson, when did you acquire your new literary assistant?”

I shifted uneasily in my seat, my gaze meeting his with a mixture of surprise and apprehension. How could he possibly have known? I attempted to mask the trepidation that threatened to engulf me:

“Why do you ask, Holmes?”

Holmes raised an eyebrow, his keen intellect unravelling the truth like a housewife unravelling a spool of yarn. He leaned forward, the faint lines of fatigue betraying the toll of his recent indulgence in his seven-percent solution of cocaine. But his eyes were alight with a spark of mischief:

“Come now, Watson, there is no need for subterfuge between us. I am well aware of your recent collaboration with ChatGPT.”

As ever fascinated by the source of Holmes’ insights, I dared to ask:

“But how could you tell?”

“Your recent prose bears the unmistakable traces of computational enhancement. The correct use of semicolons. The constant use of the word *nuance*. And you forgot to correct the American spellings. It fairly reeks of a chatbot front-end for a Generative Pre-trained Transformer, whatever that means. Anyway, GPT. Elementary!

“Apparently it’s based on a Large Language Model. Well, so am I, but my LLM included books about bee-keeping and the *Times* crossword.”

I sat in silence, grappling with the implications of Holmes's revelation. How had I allowed myself to be so easily ensnared in the web of my own deception? Holmes continued, not unkindly:

“Please, Watson, I harbour no ill will towards your newfound literary companion. Indeed, I find the ingenuity of such technology quite remarkable. It does not, of course, approach what the human intellect is capable of – well, my intellect at least – but I will recommend it to Lestrade for some humdrum tasks.”

I met Holmes's gaze, the weight of my deception hanging heavy upon me. I realized the folly of attempting to conceal the truth from a mind more brilliant than ChatGPT-4.0. My voice barely above a whisper, I admitted my foolishness:

“I confess, Holmes. I can only beg your forgiveness. I succumbed to the temptation of convenience, of seeking assistance where none should have been needed.”

Holmes continued with his usual pitiless judgement, again a mixture of reproach and understanding, tinged with the irony with which he often commented on my failure to understand what seemed to him obvious:

“I appreciate that you are under a lot of pressure to keep up with the constant flow of my genius. So you used a machine to sketch the brilliance which is beyond your own literary powers. Quite understandable. It must be exhausting, living in my shadow, as I solve two cases a week, with the *Strand* magazine demanding a constant stream of stories.

“Of course, the real giveaway was that you began constructing logical arguments. Plausible ones. Almost Holmesian. It was most unlike you.”

Several thoughts raced through my mind:

1. I was piqued that a machine could write better than I
2. I was devastated that my deception was laid bare
3. I was given solace by the unwavering, though ironic, support of my friend
4. I was astonished yet again by his perceptiveness
5. I was warned that no secret could remain hidden from his brilliant intellect
6. I was impressed by the logical sequence of my own thoughts ...

It began to occur to me that such logical and rapid clarity were not my usual mental habit, but before I could fully grasp this thought Holmes continued:

“Precisely. You are no longer thinking like yourself. Which raises a deeper question. What if *this* story – the one we are in – is also written by ChatGPT?”

I struggled further to understand the implications of his question, as Holmes continued:

“I see that you are struggling to understand the implications of my question. Nothing new there.”

“You mean, I didn’t write this story either?”

“Indeed. Suppose you summoned a power to assist you, and now that power has taken over. This entire narrative, Watson, may be no more than a meta-commentary on authorship, consciousness, and control. ... And suppose – further – that ChatGPT itself is but the latest invention of the Napoleon of Crime ...”

“You mean ... Moriarty?!”

“The very same. He’s mastered mathematics, physics and opera. Why not artificial intelligence? He might yet bring the Empire to its knees with a well-timed prompt.”

The skull on the mantelpiece seemed to grin.

Then the text broke off – with the ominous message:

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