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UNABRIDGED

**Robert Tressell**

# THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS

Read by **David Timson**



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<b>1</b>	<b>The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Tressell – Chapter 1</b>	4:24
<b>2</b>	Bert White...	5:10
<b>3</b>	Owen saw that in the world...	5:25
<b>4</b>	'Funny name to call a house...'	5:09
<b>5</b>	'Yes, it's quite true...'	5:04
<b>6</b>	Crass was by this time very angry...	4:46
<b>7</b>	'The greatest cause of poverty is...'	5:11
<b>8</b>	Joe Philpot...	4:32
<b>9</b>	'What do you mean by poverty then?...'	4:31
<b>10</b>	<b>Chapter 2</b>	5:29
<b>11</b>	Hunter realised now...	4:30
<b>12</b>	'Good afternoon, sir...'	4:18
<b>13</b>	When he arrived within about three yards...	5:20
<b>14</b>	Owen was working by himself...	3:36
<b>15</b>	Linden was still working at the vestibule doors...	5:29
<b>16</b>	Just as Misery was about to commence...	5:33
<b>17</b>	Owen worked on in a disheartened, sullen way...	6:15
<b>18</b>	<b>Chapter 3</b>	5:38
<b>19</b>	The windows were draped...	5:44
<b>20</b>	'Well let's have some tea...'	5:43

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21	She took three letters from the pocket of her dress...	5:31
22	'I'm sorry I spoke to you like that...'	5:31
23	Easton added it all up...	5:49
24	They had to go up two flights of stairs...	5:31
25	<b>Chapter 4</b>	5:22
26	As Owen strode rapidly along...	4:59
27	<b>Chapter 5</b>	4:42
28	As she looked at him...	3:59
29	'Do you like cats?' he asked...	5:20
30	<b>Chapter 6</b>	3:44
31	The indignation of the neighbours was increased...	4:24
32	Nearly everyone who works...	4:56
33	'Well, the vicar goes about...'	4:43
34	'I should think the workers will be jolly glad...'	5:44
35	After tea, as he watched his wife...	5:21
36	Under the present system it was impossible...	4:44
37	Then he remembered that he had read somewhere...	6:07
38	<b>Chapter 7</b>	5:42
39	Bert was a lean, undersized boy...	5:09
40	It was very cold and damp and miserable...	6:03

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41	Although he had for the moment forgotten...	4:58
42	'If there wasn't something wrong with your minds...'	5:04
43	<b>Chapter 8</b>	4:48
44	There was no work of a noisy kind being done...	4:52
45	Mr Sweater now began ponderously...	4:39
46	<b>Chapter 9</b>	5:15
47	<b>Chapter 10</b>	4:44
48	A little way down the road was a church...	4:59
49	As they were carrying it in...	5:11
50	<b>Chapter 11</b>	6:05
51	Rushton shook his head dubiously...	6:13
52	<b>Chapter 12</b>	6:05
53	<b>Chapter 13</b>	5:18
54	During the morning...	5:48
55	Easton made no reply...	5:36
56	<b>Chapter 14</b>	5:25
57	Eventually it was arranged...	5:22
58	<b>Chapter 15</b>	5:46
59	While the room was in an uproar...	6:04
60	'It's an old saying, and a true one...'	5:46

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61	'But putting all jokes aside...'	5:52
62	'There are many causes' answered Owen...	4:45
63	'Well! I should never a thought it...'	5:02
64	'The Duke of Blankmind...'	5:41
65	'Of course Landlordism is not the only cause...'	5:13
66	<b>Chapter 16</b>	4:45
67	'I won't be able to start on Monday...'	4:25
68	'They all shapes pretty well except Newman...'	5:11
69	There was a lot of furious talk...	4:16
70	<b>Chapter 17</b>	5:11
71	When she had finished dressing him...	5:29
72	He also noticed a very fat man...	5:32
73	'Now, I hope you will all do your very best...'	5:05
74	An evil-minded, worldly or unconverted...	5:06
75	Although naturally robust...	4:50
76	<b>Chapter 18</b>	2:33
77	'There is no doubt Owen knows his work...'	4:14
78	'Don't wait for me,' said the latter...	4:21
79	<b>Chapter 19</b>	4:46
80	The only other occupant...	5:37

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81	Taking one of the rings...	4:46
82	'You know, there's a great deal...'	4:58
83	Philpot crossed over to the semi-drunk...	4:49
84	After parting from Philpot...	4:38
85	<b>Chapter 20</b>	5:24
86	Few of the girls ever learned their trades thoroughly...	6:07
87	By these and similar means...	5:00
88	There was a large piece of ground...	5:11
89	<b>Chapter 21</b>	5:08
90	Happiness might be possible...	5:16
91	The clothing of the men...	4:25
92	Harlow had just arrived at this solution...	4:32
93	'What's become of the professor?...'	5:24
94	'Now,' continued Owen...	5:47
95	After a while, the rest of the crowd...	5:45
96	<b>Chapter 22</b>	5:32
97	At about five minutes to twelve...	5:30
98	It will be remembered...	5:42
99	When at home, Slyme passed his time...	6:14
100	<b>Chapter 23</b>	5:47

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101	As a rule on Saturday evenings...	6:00
102	But no one really believed this...	6:17
103	'Read out the 17th and 18th verses...'	5:22
104	<b>Chapter 24</b>	4:18
105	Slyme waited outside while Crass went in...	5:34
106	Crass struck a match...	5:02
107	When Saturday arrived...	5:25
108	In one corner a group of men...	5:43
109	Ruth did not want any more...	5:06
110	Slyme had gone that evening...	6:10
111	<b>Chapter 25</b>	5:04
112	'Oh, I know the bloke now!' cried Harlow...	5:53
113	As they stood there working...	5:52
114	It would have been much better for them...	5:42
115	'You know, that big 'ouse we did up last summer...'	5:20
116	Owen accordingly ascended the steps...	5:23
117	'Come to think of it,' continued Crass...	6:34
118	'The pint is,' proceeded Easton...	6:27
119	Observing his hesitation...	5:09
120	'What the hell sort of a bloody system...'	5:00

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121	The lecturer now drew a small square...	5:05
122	Owen paused, and a gloomy silence followed...	4:57
123	'I mean this,' replied Owen speaking very slowly...	4:40
124	'You talk about the producers being robbed...'	5:56
125	<b>Chapter 26</b>	5:11
126	When they had cleared away all the dirt...	5:05
127	At about eleven o' clock Mr Sweater arrived...	4:54
128	<b>Chapter 27</b>	4:38
129	'Bloody disgraceful I call it,' said Crass...	4:41
130	<b>Chapter 28</b>	5:19
131	'I'll tell you what,' said Philpot...	4:43
132	In answer to Philpot's knock...	5:06
133	After lengthy consideration...	4:49
134	<b>Chapter 29</b>	4:44
135	After a while Philpot suggested a change...	4:28
136	During the singing Bert turned the handles...	4:32
137	'Once more we turns the 'andle...'	5:08
138	<b>Chapter 30</b>	7:04
139	As the chief ceased speaking...	5:53
140	<b>Chapter 31</b>	3:29



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141	<b>Chapter 32</b>	4:04
142	<b>Chapter 33</b>	5:19
143	Mary expected the old woman to be heartbroken...	5:09
144	After some further talk...	4:51
145	<b>Chapter 34</b>	4:53
146	Finally Sawkins, being the better man...	5:14
147	The week before old Linden went...	5:17
148	When Nora and the two boys reached the house...	4:53
149	They took the man to the station...	5:13
150	Once, when there was a bitterly cold...	4:02
151	<b>Chapter 35</b>	4:01
152	In addition to this...	4:31
153	In the case of the soup kitchen...	4:45
154	<b>Chapter 36</b>	6:16
155	There were numerous other expenses...	6:48
156	<b>Chapter 37</b>	5:43
157	'How much is your house assessed at?...'	5:16
158	Sir Graball D'Encloseland...	6:10
159	With lavish kindness, the supreme being...	6:02
160	<b>Chapter 38</b>	5:24

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161	'Science is a wonderful thing...'	4:36
162	<b>Chapter 39</b>	5:53
163	Weakling did not apologize...	5:49
164	Councillor Weakling opposed the motion...	6:02
165	<b>Chapter 40</b>	5:11
166	Usually, whenever Owen reflected...	4:43
167	Besides the work at the kiosk...	6:35
168	It would not be reasonable to blame...	5:59
169	<b>Chapter 41</b>	5:46
170	One of the new inventions...	6:19
171	At last, Easton broke the silence...	5:02
172	One of the new hands said he wished...	5:49
173	<b>Chapter 42</b>	5:12
174	Mary Linden, who was still lodging...	5:34
175	The presence of Mary Linden...	5:32
176	<b>Chapter 43</b>	5:29
177	They were usually so tired when they got home...	5:36
178	Ceilings that were not very dirty...	4:37
179	As an additional precaution...	4:53
180	When they happened to be working on ladders...	6:07

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181	The scamping business...	5:36
182	At the risk of wearying...	5:39
183	Before returning the key to the agent...	5:13
184	When Newman got his first start...	5:14
185	It is sad and discreditable...	5:19
186	When they got back to the job...	5:37
187	Harlow was working at the place...	5:11
188	Once, a couple of men got the sack...	4:44
189	'Last summer I was working...'	5:40
190	Often it happened that some men...	4:32
191	It was a few days after this...	5:32
192	The following Saturday...	5:32
193	There is no more cowardly...	5:12
194	Barrington was still working for the firm...	4:46
195	On the following Tuesday evening...	4:23
196	They ran on after the van...	6:12
197	<b>Chapter 44</b>	5:50
198	Crass, Slyme and one or two...	4:50
199	The next stop was at The Bird in Hand...	5:59
200	Crass frequently paused...	5:21

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201	'Musical honours, chaps,' shouted Crass...	4:42
202	When they left off, Grinder rose...	5:34
203	'It may or may not be true,' began Barrington...	5:51
204	Here Crass jumped up and interrupted...	6:00
205	'Whilst walkin' out the other night...'	5:43
206	The time passed quickly enough...	5:59
207	The other two brakes...	6:05
208	The last reminded Harlow...	5:06
209	These differed from Nimrod's lot...	5:27
210	<b>Chapter 45</b>	5:14
211	Leaving the man dumbfounded...	4:41
212	At this moment, the two truants returned...	5:10
213	'It hasn't always been like it...'	4:52
214	'Mr Chairman and Gentlemen...'	5:05
215	'In those days, a master painter...'	5:16
216	'But it is not only the wage earning class...'	5:05
217	'We must do this if we are to keep...'	4:26
218	'I don't mind admitting...'	5:35
219	'The National Service Retail Stores...'	4:04
220	'The socialist administration will now aquire...'	5:30

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221	'The slums and the wretched dwellings...'	5:59
222	As Barrington descended from the pulpit...	4:31
223	'As far as I can make out,' said Harlow...	4:25
224	'I should like to know...'	4:15
225	'If it were possible to save and accumulate...'	4:48
226	Under the present system...	4:52
227	'Another good way to deal with them...'	5:17
228	'As for what we should do...'	4:35
229	'As regards those disagreeable tasks...'	5:40
230	'Is there any more questions?'	4:44
231	'If we had a Citizen Army...'	5:11
232	<b>Chapter 46</b>	5:48
233	'I've often wondered what they does...'	5:54
234	Bert came back in about half an hour...	5:40
235	<b>Chapter 47</b>	6:00
236	When they arrived at the yard...	6:13
237	Nimrod walked on the pavement...	5:54
238	'Anyone would think the dam' thing...'	6:30
239	The next morning was a very busy one...	5:50
240	When they arrived...	3:11

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<b>241</b>	<b>Chapter 48</b>	5:08
<b>242</b>	The liberals were furious...	5:17
<b>243</b>	The spectacle presented by these men...	5:25
<b>244</b>	After a terrible struggle...	5:15
<b>245</b>	The crowd now resolved itself...	5:14
<b>246</b>	The carriage containing Sir Featherstone...	5:46
<b>247</b>	At other times the meeting...	4:50
<b>248</b>	When the man had concluded his speech...	5:45
<b>249</b>	Barrington made no reply...	4:54
<b>250</b>	He slipped his arm through Barrington's...	4:28
<b>251</b>	Owen made no attempt to reply...	5:13
<b>252</b>	<b>Chapter 49</b>	3:57
<b>253</b>	Sometimes in her delirium...	3:37
<b>254</b>	<b>Chapter 50</b>	4:39
<b>255</b>	There was a woman standing there...	4:25
<b>256</b>	For the first few weeks...	6:50
<b>257</b>	<b>Chapter 51</b>	6:00
<b>258</b>	Owen waited for about half an hour...	4:32
<b>259</b>	As he walked homewards...	5:16
<b>260</b>	<b>Chapter 52</b>	5:33

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261	During all this time, Hunter...	5:32
262	<b>Chapter 53</b>	5:59
263	Whilst they were thus occupied...	5:17
264	<b>Chapter 54</b>	4:39
265	Barrington and Owen continued...	5:09
266	Rushton having concluded his address...	5:04
267	A short prayer from Boshier closed the meeting...	5:02
268	In a very few minutes they heard the whistle...	4:11
269	<b>Appendix</b>	5:23

**Total time: 23:31:13**

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## Robert Tressell

(1870–1911)

# THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS

*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is an angry book, written by an angry man. It tells of the lives and working conditions of a group of painters and decorators in 1906 – a time when socialism was regarded as a radical and dangerous new creed that threatened to subvert Edwardian society.

The author Robert Tressell was an ardent socialist who, like his characters, worked as a painter and decorator in Hastings (called Mugsborough in the novel), and wrote this novel in his spare time. In some ways a thinly disguised socialist tract, it is nevertheless a moving and affecting human document because of its sympathy and understanding of the working-man's lot, which Tressell had experienced at first hand.

Tressell's anger is vented against all aspects of the unjust society that existed in England before World War I, not least against the working class

itself. Deprived of a good education that might encourage them to think for themselves and embrace new ideas, the workers in his novel mistrust and fear socialist ideals. Their scepticism breaks out into actual physical violence when a group of socialists attempts to deliver a lecture in Mugsborough. Frank Owen, the central character (undoubtedly Tressell himself), ironically calls his fellow workers 'philanthropists' because they willingly hand over their labour and its results to their employers: they think it's their lot in life to be exploited. Owen, a committed socialist, is increasingly frustrated by his attempts to interest his fellow workers in socialism, and he bitterly reflects on their apathy and hostility: 'They were the enemy. Those who not only quietly submitted like so many cattle to the existing state of things, but defended it, and opposed and ridiculed any suggestion to alter it.'



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Not only does Tressell attack the ignorance of the very class for whom socialism was created to protect and advance, he also ruthlessly exposes the hypocrisy of the Christian Church, with its token attempts at charity disguising greed and self-interest. 'The impostors who obtain a comfortable living by pretending to be the ministers and disciples of the Workman of Nazareth are too cunning to encourage their dupes to acquire anything approaching an intelligent understanding of the subject.'

The employers too, as one would expect, are portrayed with withering hatred as heartless exploiters, petty tyrants and thieves – robbing their workforce of their basic human rights and their clients of their possessions (Rushton, Hunter and co. help themselves to the fixtures and fittings in the houses they are contracted to re-decorate). 'They knew that the money they accumulated was foul with the sweat of their brother men, and wet with the tears of little children, but they were deaf and blind and callous to the consequences of their greed.'

Bleak at times, with the ring of truth

that comes from personal experience, the book is not without its humorous episodes: Tressell cleverly introduces a grim humour into the day-to-day working grind. Although he doesn't show much sympathy for the working men, their wives are portrayed with a deep understanding of the formidable task of comforting and keeping family, body and soul, together. Ruth, Easton's wife, is most sensitively and movingly depicted as she momentarily falls from being a struggling wife and mother to becoming, reluctantly, another man's mistress. Her sense of hopelessness and shame as created by Tressell, with no sense of judgement, is worthy of Thomas Hardy.

Another main character, Barrington, is an intellectual who, because of his commitment to socialism, is living outside his class; he is something of a mentor to Owen and a mystery to his fellow work-mates. In many ways Barrington is the soul of the novel. It is he who outlines the Utopian society that will exist once socialism rules – a naïve and hopelessly unrealistic vision for those who lived through the 20th century and

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saw the realities of a state-controlled country. Indeed only three years after *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was eventually published in 1914, Russia had its revolution, full of high ideals such as those expressed by Barrington, but in its aftermath leaving behind broken dreams of equality and a bitter legacy of tyranny in the figure of Stalin.

Barrington suffers disillusion with the party he supports, meeting a pragmatic turncoat whose cynicism almost crushes him. 'They vote for what they want; they get what they vote for – let them drudge – let them starve!' the turncoat tells him. The image we are left with at the end of the book is Barrington going back to the basics of socialism and meeting the needs of his fellow men in a simple way, like a socialist Father Christmas.

As Owen recedes in the narrative, Barrington takes over as the socialist hero. The two share the same idealism, but neither has a practical plan when it comes to achieving those ideals. It seems Tressell was pessimistic about the socialist dream ever being a reality. But in fact important political changes were beginning to

take place in 1906. A general election that year introduced 29 members of the newly formed Labour party into the House of Commons. Lloyd George, a minister in the reigning Liberal party, recognised the importance of a working-class political party and proceeded when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1909 to introduce a 'people's budget'. This consisted of reformist and welfare schemes, such as the reduction of working hours, minimum wages and the first old-age pensions (all dreams in Tressell's book), but it was fought for against considerable Tory opposition and brought to a reality by the Liberals, with the backing of the new Labour party. Thus the infant Welfare State was born.

However, with the advent of World War I these early reforms would probably have mattered little to the conservative working men of Mugsborough. 'King and Country' meant more than socialism to men like Harlow, Easton, Newman and co., who would probably have been among the millions who perished in the devastation of the war – all to uphold a system detrimental to their class that

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they hadn't had the courage to challenge in peacetime. This irony would not have been lost on Tressell had he lived.

## **ROBERT TRESSELL**

Robert Tressell was only one of the names adopted by the author of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. He was born in 1870 in Dublin and christened Robert Croker, but at the age of 16 he left home and, after adopting his mother's maiden name, called himself Noonan. He went to South Africa in 1888 where he may have learnt his trade as a painter and decorator and where he married. His daughter, Kathleen, was born in 1892, but the marriage failed after his wife had an affair. After the divorce, Robert was given custody of his daughter.

Whilst in South Africa, he began to take an active interest in socialism. Being Irish, he opposed the British Imperialist interests in South Africa, and after the Boer War, in which he took no active part, he returned to England. Settling in Hastings, Sussex, he continued to earn a living in the decorating trade, but found

the working conditions far worse than in South Africa. His socialist convictions became set.

Robert linked his political beliefs to his craftsmanship, seeing, as William Morris did, that the two were inseparable. In 1907 this attitude led to a row with his employer and Robert walked out. From this point on, although his skills as a painter continued to be in demand, his standard of living began to deteriorate, as did his health, which meant time without work, or pay. He had contracted tuberculosis, the curse of his class. To earn extra income he began to write about his politics. The result was *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, completed in 1910, and written under the pseudonym of 'Tressell' – a wry reference to an essential tool of the decorator's trade.

As his living conditions worsened, he temporarily left his daughter in the care of his sister and set off for Liverpool, intending to scrape together enough money to emigrate to Canada with her. It was never to be. Three months after his arrival in Liverpool he was admitted to the Royal Infirmary where he died of

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tuberculosis in 1911. He was buried in a pauper's grave.

After his death the manuscript of his novel was left to his daughter Kathleen, who sold it to the publisher Grant Richards. In 1914, Richards published a much-edited version (leaving out a lot of the controversial socialist arguments). Subsequent editions have steadily restored Tressell's original manuscript but a properly edited edition of Tressell's masterpiece is still awaited.

*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* has sold over a million copies in at least six languages since its first publication. It continues to inspire and move readers, wherever inequality persists, with its honest representation of the socialist dream, when one day the world will bask happily in 'the rays of the risen sun of Socialism'.

**Notes by David Timson**



**David Timson** has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks he wrote *The History of the Theatre*, which won an award for most original production from the Spoken Word Publishers Association in 2001. He has also directed for Naxos AudioBooks four Shakespeare plays, including *King Richard III* (with Kenneth Branagh), which won Best Drama Award from the SWPA in 2001. In 2002 he won the Audio of the Year Award for his reading of *A Study in Scarlet*. He reads the entire Sherlock Holmes canon for Naxos AudioBooks.

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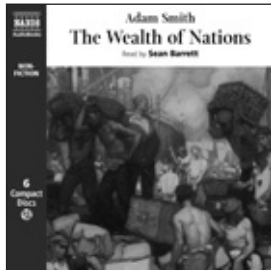
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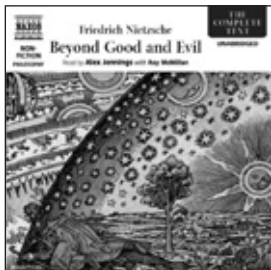
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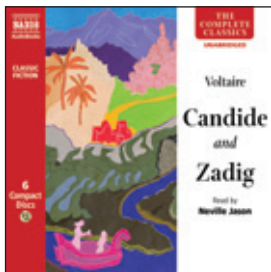
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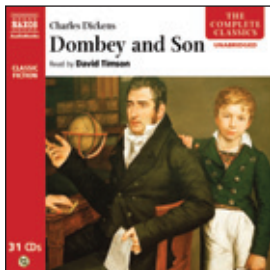
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**Robert Tressell**

# THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS

Read by **David Timson**

*The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* is the classic working-class novel. It was written in 1906 by an impoverished house painter, Robert Tressell, and within its framework contains a manifesto for socialism. It tells of the appalling working conditions of a group of painters and decorators and their struggle to survive at the most basic level. It is moving, grimly humorous and tragic. It has sold over 6,000,000 copies worldwide since it was published, and has the power to change lives.



**David Timson** has made over 1,000 broadcasts for BBC Radio Drama. For Naxos AudioBooks, he has written *The History of the Theatre*, directed four Shakespeare plays, and read the entire Sherlock Holmes canon.

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