

Sherlock Holmes and the Gear-Filled Weapons of Mass Destruction



Photo by Alex Bailey

Robert Downey Jr. as Sherlock Holmes and Jude Law as Dr. John Watson star alongside many gears in Warner Bros. Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' action-adventure mystery "Sherlock Holmes," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures (Photos courtesy Warner Bros. Pictures).

What's that sound? The churning of gear teeth meshing with the creak of film reels. A bit of "Holmesian deduction" leads us to the conclusion that it's time for the next installment of the Addendum's Gears in Film Series!

And what better setting for a big-screen gear cameo than the industrial steam engine-filled era of late 19th century London; home to famed consulting detective Sherlock Holmes and his partner, Dr. Watson. Director Guy Ritchie's 2009 adaptation of the celebrity sleuth's adventures gives us gear-heads plenty to scheme about.

Gears make their first major entrance at a shipyard as Holmes and Watson fend off a Goliath-like adversary. Holmes runs and ducks under heavy chains and poles reinforcing a ship as his enemy hacks them systematically with an axe. As the ship begins to roll, the giant strikes a blow to the winch brake. The gears are released and spin at whirlwind speed, sparks fly, the ship roars to life and is whipped out of the yard. Holmes narrowly averts disaster thanks to the lightning fast reflexes of Watson, and they watch the ship sink.

The next major gear appearance comes in an industrial slaughterhouse where Holmes and Watson are led by their investigation. "They cleared something away from here, not minutes ago," Holmes says.

"Like what," says Watson.

"Not sure; something mechanical."

He then notices a dead rat, the obvious subject of a lab experiment, and he cuts its tail to preserve as evidence.

Next, the villain Blackwood sets a fiery trap for the duo, complete with a hostage as bait and a slaughter machine. As Holmes sets about to disengage the assembly line, he is able to jam an open gear assembly in the floor that is facilitating the machine.

The gears grind against the jam and prove strong enough to keep engaging; although, they delay the machine enough for the heroes to narrowly avert yet another disaster.

The most significant gear role of the movie comes as an integral part of Blackwood's dark magic: the previously missing machine that evidently serves as a chemical weapon. "The first of its kind...It will revolutionize warfare," Holmes deduces from the rattail specimen, which displayed blue discoloration and other "tell-tale traces of cyanide."

The intricate contraption features numerous gears of varying sizes operating in every which direction. It uses electromagnetic waves to convert the cyanide chemical into gas to be released into the ventilation system of British Parliament. As a fight scene erupts surrounding the machine, gears churning in the backdrop, Holmes and his cohorts struggle to deactivate the machine. "It's specifically designed to prevent us from disarming it," Holmes says after they try lodging a coin between the gears only for it to be violently repelled.

The gear teeth click as they mesh, and the clock is ticking as time runs short for them. A contained explosion is produced using Holmes' famous clay pipe, and they are able to remove the cyanide-filled cylinders before the gas is released. The gears slow to a stop, and Blackwood's plan to take over the world is, for now, delayed.

Back at home on Baker Street, Holmes is quite literally tying up the loose ends of the case. When word comes of another linked murder and evidence supporting a stolen piece of the machine, the case is reopened. The stage is set for a sequel featuring the true supervillain: Professor Moriarty—to be continued...

...Until the next edition of Addendum's Gears in Film Series.