***{Intro music plays}***

**Will Humble**: Hello and welcome to the first episode of “Pod Pals,” a podcast providing excerpts of classic media and entertainment, followed by a commentary on what makes it unique and engaging. My name is Will Humble, [**John Ferri**: and I’m John Ferri].

**Will Humble:** Today’s episode is called “Great Wordsmiths,” and we’ll be looking at one of the greatest classic English authors, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

**John Ferri:** You probably know Sir Arthur Conan Doyle from his work with the Sherlock Holmes novels. Some of the most famous Sherlock Holmes stories include *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Final Problem.*

**Will Humble:** Today, though, we will be sharing a lesser-known but very interesting story about Sherlock Holmes. It is the last in the Sherlock Holmes mystery series, and it’s called *His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes.* John Ferri will be reading an excerpt and encouraging you to go out and read it on your own. Afterwards, we’ll talk about what makes this story interesting and what makes Doyle such a great writer.

***John Ferri: ‘It was*** *nine o'clock at night upon the second of August--the most terrible August in the history of* ***the world.*** *One might have thought already that God's curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air. The sun had long set, but one blood-red gash like an open wound lay low in the distant west. Above, the stars were shining brightly, and below, the lights of the shipping glimmered in the bay. The two famous Germans stood beside the stone parapet of the garden walk, with the long, low, heavily gabled house* ***behind them,*** *and they looked down upon the broad sweep of the beach at the foot of the great chalk* ***cliff*** *in which Von* ***Bork,*** *like some wandering eagle, had perched himself four years before.* ***They stood*** *with their heads close together, talking in low, confidential tones. From below the two glowing ends of their cigars might have been the smouldering eyes of some malignant fiend looking down in the darkness. A remarkable man this Von* ***Bork****--a man who could hardly be matched* ***among all*** *the devoted agents of the Kaiser.’*

**Will Humble:** Wow! Pretty intense stuff!

**John Ferri:** Definitely!

**Will Humble:** Alright, let’s move on to the commentary, then. So, John, why don’t you tell the audience why you chose this excerpt?

**John Ferri:** Well, this is an interesting section, full of imagery and great world-building, taken from the beginning of the story. You can tell that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wants to set the scene. The atmosphere is tense and fairly negative. That’s established right off the bat with this key phrase: “the most terrible August in the history of the world.”

**Will Humble:** Right, yeah. So let’s keep in mind – this story is set in wartime.

**John Ferri:** Yes, exactly. It’s set in the build-up to the First World War, or as they called it at the time, the Great War. That was the name that people gave this conflict because, at that point, it was the largest and most violent conflict in history. In this story, Sherlock Holmes investigates a case that puts himself right in the middle of escalating tensions between his country, Great Britain, and their enemy, the Kaiser’s Germany.

**Will Humble:** Alright, very interesting. Thanks for giving the audience that background on the story’s setting, John. Now, what can you tell us about the title, *His Last Bow*?

**John Ferri:** Well, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had written a lot of Sherlock Holmes stories before this one was published in 1917. So, it really is Sherlock’s last bow. It’s the final case that he took on.

**Will Humble:** So, it seems like the war really figures into this story in a big way. What can you say about that?

**John Ferri:** The case that Sherlock takes on isn’t a standard detective case. At the beginning of the story, Sherlock Holmes and his assistant Dr. Watson have already been working in intelligence for the British government over the course of about two years. They’re both aging and past their prime at this point, but still very effective at solving cases. Without giving too much away, I can say that Sherlock and Watson’s work was secretive, potentially even deceptive, and it was a part of what would become the war effort. This story was actually considered by many literary scholars and critics later on as having been British propaganda. It was likely used to raise the morale and motivate the country to win the war.

**Will Humble:** Very interesting. Thanks for giving the audience a little bit of basic information about the story without spoiling any of the big details. Now, I think we can move on to our last section of our commentary. Why do you think this story is an example of great writing?

**John Ferri:** Sure. So, basically, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has demonstrated many times that he’s a great writer, at least for popular stories. He may not be Shakespeare, but his stories are very engaging, and they even show up pretty regularly in American high school and middle school classrooms as part of the curriculum, because they’re considered part of the English literary canon.

**Will Humble:** Yeah, in fact, I remember reading *The Hound of the Baskervilles* when I was in middle school.

**John Ferri:** Right, that’s definitely a good one, too. So, in this story, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle shows us again that he can write compelling fiction. One of the best aspects of his writing is his use of imagery to build the story world. That’s why I chose this excerpt. Before Sherlock has said anything, and before readers even know exactly what this case will involve, they already get a sense of what’s at stake. They can picture in their heads very clearly what some parts of this initial scene look like. There’s also this very tense, foreboding atmosphere that signals the war that’s on the horizon. A reader would pick up on that, especially a reader back in 1917, because of the reference to a horrible August. That would sound a lot like August 1914, on the eve of the conflict.

**Will Humble:** Alright, crazy stuff! That should leave everybody with a lot to process. Great! Alright, this has been the first episode of the “Pod Pals” podcast, ***“Great Wordsmiths.”*** The story, *His Last Bow: The War Service of Sherlock Holmes* is available for free non-commercial use on the Project Gutenberg website. That’s where we found it. The intro and outro music to this podcast is a great track called ‘The Giving Tree,’ and it’s part of Podington’s awesome collection of music tracks that are free to share and adapt for non-commercial purposes. Just remember to attribute Podington Bear, following the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 3.0 license. Okay, well, we hope you enjoyed this first segment of ‘Pod Pals,’ and we hope to see you again next time, when we’ll be discussing a more recent story from the famous George Orwell. Stay tuned! Goodbye.

***{Outro music plays}***