

## **The Mystery of Harry Quatermain and Other Conundrums** by Rick Lai

Sometimes an author can make a major contradiction in a series and it leads to all sorts of wild theories about his characters. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is an excellent example. He had John H. Watson marry Mary Morstan in *The Sign of Four* (1890), a novel whose internal evidence indicated that it was set in 1888. Doyle then proceeded to write stories set in 1887 that had references to Watson's wife and the events of *The Sign of Four*. This discrepancy started a flurry of articles by Sherlock Holmes fans that Watson must have had an earlier wife and was trying to cover up her existence. If you examine the Allan Quatermain series by H. Rider Haggard carefully, you will find a similar inconsistency involving the son of the British hunter. In fact, you will even conclude that Allan had three wives instead of the ill-fated pair described by Haggard.

"A Tale of Three Lions" (1887) tells how Allan and his son Harry went on a gold prospecting trip in South Africa. This endeavor happened in a town called Pilgrim's Rest. This is a real historical site. Gold was discovered there in 1873. In fact, this was the first gold rush to occur in South Africa. Pilgrim's Rest was declared a public prospecting gold digging area in 1875. Therefore, Allan could not have traveled there any earlier than 1875. His son Harry was "about fourteen" at the time. Based on a careful scrutiny of "A Tale of Three Lions," it can be concluded that Harry was born around 1861.

"Allan's Wife" (1889) related the story of Harry's birth. Allan married Stella Carson when Dingaan was King of the Zulus. Stella became pregnant very early in the marriage and died shortly after giving birth to Harry. Considering that Dingaan was overthrown as king in January 1840, then Harry must have been born no later than that year. How can the Harry Quatermain born around 1840 be the fourteen-year old boy who was at Pilgrim's Rest in 1875? There weren't any earlier gold rushes in South Africa.

To the best of my knowledge, the only attempt to create an Allan Quatermain chronology was done by Peter Haining for the H. Rider Haggard collection, *Hunter Quatermain's Story: the Uncollected Adventures of Allan Quatermain*, (London: Peter Owens Publishers, 2003). The entry for "Allan's Wife" seems to have been mistyped. It reads "1842-69." It probably intended to be "1842-1859." There is a gap of fifteen years in the story between the birth of Harry Quatermain and the novel's concluding scene. Haining seems to place Harry's birth in 1844. "A Tale of Three Lions" is placed by Haining in 1858, the year when Harry would have been fourteen if he had been born in 1844. I disagree with Haining's dating of "Allan's Wife." Haining also ignores the issue of the historical gold rush in Pilgrim's Rest when designating a year for "A Tale of Three Lions." *Maiwa's Revenge* (1888) is set one year after "A Tale of Three Lions." Haining chronologically placed the novel in 1859 because of his earlier decision involving "A Tale of Three Lions." *Maiwa's Revenge* should be moved to 1876.

The door to speculation opens wider when it is remembered that Haggard had Allan acknowledging that he has told at least one lie about his past. In "Allan's Wife," Allan stated that Stella was his only wife. In *Marie* (1912), Allan confessed that he had an earlier bride. Her name was Marie Marais. She died shortly after the Zulus killed the Boer leader Piet Retief (1838). The painful memory of her death caused Allan to deny the existence of their marriage in "Allan's Wife."

If Allan hid the existence of his first marriage, what is he hiding in his irreconcilable comments about his son? Did he have two different sons named Harry born approximately twenty-one years apart? Who was the mother of the Harry Quatermain born in 1861? In *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887), Harry was studying medicine in England during the 1880's. This Harry died in a smallpox epidemic. For the sake of argument, we can assume that the ill-fated medical student was the Harry who accompanied Allan to Pilgrim's Rest in 1875. What happened to Stella Carson's real son?

This whole controversy surrounding Harry Quatermain is made even more intriguing by a change that appeared in later editions of *King Solomon's Mines*. Haining's chronology places the events of the novel in 1880. At the start of the novel, Allan Quatermain recalled first hearing rumors of the ancient diamond mines from a hunter named Evans about thirty years ago (c. 1850). Twenty years after his meeting with Evans, Allan received a Portuguese map detailing the location of the mines. The map would have come into Allan's possession around 1870. In the current Project Gutenberg e-text of *King Solomon's Mines* (from a 1907 edition), Allan made this observation about the map: "I have never showed it to anybody yet except to a drunken old Portuguese trader who translated it for me, and had forgotten all about it by the next morning." The original version of the passage read this way: "I have never showed it to anybody yet except my dear wife, who is dead, and she the thought it was all nonsense, and a drunken old Portuguese trader who translated it for me, and had forgotten all about it by the next morning."

Haggard clearly initially imagined a Mrs. Quatermain who was alive in the 1870's. Some of the discrepancies in the Allan Quatermain series can be attributed to Haggard's need to write more prequels about a popular character that perished in the second book in the series, *Allan Quaterman*. For example, Haggard initially gave Allan's age as fifty-five at the time of *King Solomon's Mines*, but the references in both "Allan's Wife" and *Marie* actually put Allan in his sixties in the 1880's by placing his birth in 1817.

Although the allusion to Allan's wife of the 1870's were conveniently edited out in subsequent editions of *King Solomon's Mines*, the problems caused by the conflicting references in "A Tale of Three Lions" and "Allan's Wife" will always remain. Just as Doyle's continuity mistakes have led to elaborate theories, so must Haggard's. It would seem that Quatermain had a third wife and two different sons named Harry.

Here is a theory to explain the discrepancies. Harry Quatermain, Allan's son by Stella, grew up to be a libertine. He had an affair with a Capetown prostitute and promptly deserted her for parts unknown. In order to spare his grandchild the stigma of being born an illegitimate child, Allan married his son's discarded paramour. Alan's grandson, the second Harry Quatermain, was born in 1861. Allan always pretended that this Harry was his own child. The mother of the second Harry died in the 1870's. In order to hide the fact that he was old enough to be the second Harry's grandfather, Allan began to lie about his age by professing to be several years younger. This deception eventually found its way into *King Solomon's Mines* in the passage where Allan portrayed himself as a man in his mid-fifties when he was really in his early sixties. Although Allan would eventually reveal his true age in later manuscripts of his life, he manufactured the falsehood that there was only one Harry Quatermain by pretending that

the medical student of the 1880's was actually Stella's son rather than her grandson. Allan didn't want the world to know that the second Harry's mother had actually been a prostitute.

The Harry Quatermain paradox is not the only chronological problem that exists in the exploits of H. Rider Haggard's hero. After achieving wealth on the expedition to King Solomon's mines, Allan retired to England. There he spent a quiet life for a few years until the death of Harry from smallpox. After this tragic event, Allan would become involved in his final African expedition as detailed in *Allan Quatermain*. In *Finished* (1917), Allan's involvement in the Zulu War of 1879 was revealed. As a sequel to the main events of the novel, Allan later witnessed in South Africa the historical death of King Cetuywayo of the Zulus (February 1884). When Cetuywayo expired, Allan was still supposedly the hunter who had yet to find the wealth of King Solomon's Mines. Allegedly a business trip involving cattle and blankets took him to Zululand. Allan could not have gone on a trip of this nature in 1884. No matter where we chronologically place the events of *King Solomon's Mines*, it had to happen before 1884 in order for Allan to have resided comfortably in England for a period of years. It must be speculated that Allan really returned to Africa for a secret reason in early 1884. During this trip, Allan visited Cetuywayo. Possibly this journey involved the first Harry Quatermain, a factor that would explain Allan's refusal to disclose the true explanation for his presence in South Africa in 1884.

Haining's chronology places the events of *Allan Quatermain* in 1884-85. Harry's funeral was on December 23rd of the year before the events of *Allan Quatermain*. By Haining's chronology, Harry's death would be assigned to December 1883. Allan is visited by Sir Henry Curtis in January (a week after the funeral) and then became embroiled in his an expedition to East Africa, an adventure that took over a year. Assigning *Allan Quatermain* to 1884-85 contradicts Allan having been in South Africa during February 1884. It would be more logical to shift the chronological placement of *Allan Quatermain* to 1885-1886. Therefore, Quatermain saw Cetuywayo's demise in February 1884, suffered the torment of Harry's death in December of the same year, and then was visited by Curtis in January 1885. Allan must have perished in 1886.

In the conclusion of *Allan Quatermain*, Allan died in an unidentified year. Haining has estimated that June 1885 was the time of Allan's death. Curtis wrote a postscript to Allan's narrative one year after the hero's death. This postscript was allegedly penned in December. Allan's full manuscript with the postscript then supposedly arrived in the hands of George Curtis, Sir Henry's brother, two years later in "December, 18-." It would then have taken at least another year for the book to be published. In other words, the book would have been published four years after Allan's death. This time interval is impossible. *Allan Quatermain* was published in 1887, and Allan certainly didn't die in 1883, one year before Cetuywayo. At the conclusion of *Allan Quatermain*, Sir Henry Curtis was ruling the secret kingdom of Zu-Vendis. George Curtis must have altered the dates in the postscripts by his brother and himself in order to hide the fact that Sir Henry had established a quick line of communications with the outside world. George wanted to create the impression that Zu-Vendis was remote and inaccessible in order to protect his brother's realm from possible European invaders. Sir Henry must have written his postscript in June 1886 just after Allan's death, and the

manuscript was then received by George near the end of 1886. Allan's narrative was then published in 1887.

This adjustment to *Allan Quatermain* impacts the chronological position of *King Solomon's Mines*. In the opening January scene, Captain Good stated that it had been three years since Curtis, Quatermain and himself had returned to England from Africa. Since this remark was made in early January, it may have been actually an interval of four years. Haining seemingly came to this conclusion and placed *King Solomon's Mines* in 1880 and the start of *Allan Quatermain* in 1884. By advancing *Allan Quatermain* a year, I have to do likewise with *King Solomon's Mines* and assign it to 1881.

Another problem with the Allan Quatermain series is that his activities in the early 1870's began to overlap based on the chronological references in the series. For example, both the opening chapters of *The Holy Flower* (1915, also known as *Allan and the Holy Flower*) and *The Ivory Child* (1916) involved different events that happened to Allan during a London trip that began in November of an unspecified year. In the March of the following year, Allan returned to Africa to participate in the expedition described in *The Holy Flower*. Two years later, the expedition that forms the bulk of *The Ivory Child* reportedly transpired. However, Haggard later filled the gap between the expeditions of *The Holy Flower* and *The Ivory Child* with the adventures told in *Heu-Heu, or the Monster* (1924), *She and Allan* (1921) and *The Treasure of the Lake* (1926). It is impossible for Allan to have all these exploits in a span of two years. Haining was apparently aware of this problem, and accommodated it by extending the gap between the expeditions of *The Holy Flower* and *The Ivory Child* to four years. Both *She and Allan* and *Allan Quatermain* feature the Zulu warrior Umslopogaas. In *Allan Quatermain*, Umslopogaas made reference to their meeting twelve years earlier. This meeting was eventually told by Haggard in *She and Allan*. Haining's chronology had *She and Allan* in 1872 since *Allan Quatermain* was given the slot of 1884-85. By shifting *Allan Quatermain* to 1885-86, *She and Allan* must be shifted to 1873 in order to preserve the interval of twelve years. This decision then causes *The Treasure of the Lake*, allocated to 1873 by Haining, to be pushed down to 1872, the year originally belonging to *She and Allan*. *Heu-Heu, or the Monster* can not be moved from 1871 because it has to have been set before *She and Allan* due to the fact that Cetywayo was not yet King of the Zulus. He became King in October 1872, and held this position during the events of *She and Allan*. I couldn't find any references implying that *The Treasure of the Lake* happened after *She and Allan*.

Regardless of the chronological assignment of the events of *Allan Quatermain*, the courageous adventurer was certainly dead when Haggard's *She* was published in 1887. Yet Allan supposedly read *She* after its publication in England according to *She and Allan*. After writing his own account of the lost city of Kôr and hiding it away, Allan was stunned to read of Kôr in the novel *She*. In an introduction added to the manuscript to *She and Alan*, Allan then noted the discrepancies between his own experiences and *She*. For example, Billali told Ludwig Holly in *She* that no white man had ever visited Kôr for many generation even though Allan had arrived there a decade earlier. Allan argued that Billali was clearly lying. If we adopt the premise that H. Rider Haggard was merely editing the writings of Allan Quatermain rather than concocting these stories from his own imagination, the problem of Allan reading *She* can

easily be explained. Allan never read *She* nor did he write the introduction to *She and Allan*. Haggard wrote the introduction himself and ascribed it to Allan. Needing to write an introduction in order to reconcile the contradictions between the two novels, Haggard decided that a better dramatic effect would be achieved if Allan was perceived to be the author.

#### A REVISED ALLAN QUATERMAIN CHRONOLOGY

\* - an alteration or addition to Peter Haining's chronology

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| 1817     | Birth of Allan Quatermain.   |
| 1817-34* | The early portions of "Allan's Wife" (1)   |
| 1835-38  | <i>Marie</i> .   |
| 1839-40* | The primary events of "Allan's Wife" (The first Harry Quatermain is born in 1840).   |
| 1851*    | Allan first hears about the legend of King Solomon's mines.  |
| 1854-56  | <i>Child of Storm</i> (a different version of the opening chapters of this novel were also published in as a short story called "Zikali the Wizard") |
| 1855*    | The closing scene of "Allan's Wife" (2).   |
| 1861*    | Birth of the second Harry Quatermain.  |
| 1868     | "Hunter Quatermain's Story." (3)   |
| 1869     | "Long Odds."   |
| 1869-70* | The London trip described in the opening chapters of <i>The Holy Flower</i> and <i>The Ivory Child</i> .   |
| 1870     | The African expedition depicted in <i>The Holy Flower</i> .  |
| 1871     | <i>Heu-Heu, or the Monster</i> .   |
| 1871*    | Allan receives the Portuguese map to King Solomon's Mines (4).   |
| 1872*    | <i>The Treasure of the Lake</i> .  |
| 1873*    | <i>She and Allan</i> .   |
| 1874     | The African expedition described in <i>The Ivory Child</i> .   |

1875*	“A Tale of Three Lions.”
1876*	<i>Maiwa’s Revenge</i> .
1879	The main events of <i>Finished</i> .
1879	“Magepa the Buck.”
1881*	<i>King Solomon’s Mines</i> .
1882	The modern scenes of the reincarnation novel, <i>The Ancient Allan</i> .
1883	The modern scenes of the reincarnation novel, <i>Allan and the Ice Gods</i> .
1884*	Allan witnesses the death of Cetywayo in South Africa (February, told in <i>Finished</i> ), and buries his son (December, as noted in <i>Allan Quatermain</i> ).
1885-86*	The events of <i>Allan Quatermain</i> (Allan dies in June, 1886).

## NOTES

1. “Allan’s Wife tells the early life of Quatermain between his birth and the death of his second wife Stella. *Marie* actually takes place within the entire time frame of “Allan’s Wife.” As the text of *Marie* notes, this novel reveals information that contradicts earlier statements in “Allan’s Wife.”
2. There is a gap of eighteen months in *A Child of Storm* in which the final scene of “Allan’s Wife” took place.
3. “Hunter Quatermain’s Story” features a Hottenot character named Hans. This Hans is a totally different character than the Hans who appears in *Marie*, *The Holy Flower*, *Heu-Heu, or the Monster*, *The Treasure of the Lake*, *She and Allan*, and *The Ivory Child*. “Hunter’s Quatermain’s Story” is set “about ten years” before Allan told the tale to his friends in Yorkshire. Allan would have related this adventure in 1882 in my revision of Haining’s findings. A placement of 1868 would be fourteen years earlier. In Haining’s original chronology, it would have been thirteen years earlier, and 1881 would have been the year in which Allan spun his yarn. Haining probably chose 1868 instead of 1871 in order to avoid conflict with the novels featuring a different Hans that are set in 1870-74 (*Marie* is the exception). “Hunter Quatermain’s Story” also made no reference to the leg injury that Allan received in March 1869 (“Long Odds”) that gave the hunter a permanent limp. However, the limp was ignored by Haggard in most of the stories set in the 1870’s.
4. The mother of the second Harry Quatermain died after Allan’s receipt of the map in 1871 and before 1881. Other than a reference in *King Solomon’s Mines* that was excised in later editions, none of Allan’s manuscripts acknowledge the existence of Allan’s third wife.