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Who Is Enola Holmes? Everything You Need to Know About Sherlock's Sister

By Ryan Britt



She may not be in the Arthur Conan Doyle canon, but she is on Netflix. Photo: Courtesy of Netflix

The number of things Sherlock Holmes has *failed* to deduce about the world could fill a book. In fact, considering that his little-known sister, Enola Springer's apocrypha — significantly smarter and more worldly than he, perhaps the things Sherlock fails to deduce could fill just as many books as fictional brilliant young woman few people recognize. (That'd be six.)

In the new Netflix movie *Enola Holmes*, Millie Bobby Brown brings the titular teenage sister to wider acclaim in a streaming story that feels aimed at *Events* but would prefer something slightly less funny and with only one orphan (who is not exactly an orphan). In both the film and the detective novel, she is the youngest sibling of Mycroft and Sherlock, but because she's a young woman living at the tail end of the Victorian era, she's forced to navigate sexism and a world her brothers would never understand. In this way, Enola's story is a rallying cry for young people looking for non-male detectives who aren't named Narvik. This specific tale involving missing mothers, ciphers, and anti-corset diatribes. Still asking yourself, "How did I not know Sherlock had a sister?" Fair enough, says, "I cannot make bricks without clay! Give me data!" Here are the essential details about Enola and how she fits into the larger world of her family.

Enola is not a character in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's canon.

In the original 56 short stories and four novels written by Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes has only one sibling: an older brother, Mycroft, who appears in “The Bruce-Partington Plans,” and “The Final Problem,” among the original stories. The idea that Sherlock and Mycroft have a younger sister — in the form of a budding detective in her own right, who specializes in missing-persons cases — is entirely the creation of Nancy Springer, who began publishing the Enola Holmes books starting with *The Case of the Missing Marquess*.

The possibility of a secret, third Holmes sibling is the stuff of very old fanfiction.

While Enola herself is Springer's creation, the old-school fan theory that Mycroft and Sherlock have a secret sibling is almost old as the fandom itself. In the original Sherrinford Holmes in print, it is reportedly a name he considered for his fictional detective before settling on Sherlock. William S. Baring-Gould's *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* asserts something different: that Mycroft and Sherlock may have an older brother named Sherrinford, who manages their family's country estate. In the *Sherlock* TV series, when the name Sherrinford was appropriated to describe a prison that contained Eurus Holmes, who, in the fourth season of that series (2017), is Mycroft's secret sister. That said, because the Springer book was published in 2006, Enola predates the Eurus season of *Sherlock* by nine years, making it older than Baring-Gould's super-old fan theory. Enola and her mother (Helena Bonham Carter) occupy the Holmes family's country estate, which in *Enola Holmes* is the same as in the original canon.

Millie Bobby Brown's Enola is pretty faithful to the Enola of Springer's books — with two big changes.

At the beginning of Springer's first Enola Holmes book, *The Case of the Missing Marquess*, we learn that Enola's mother has gone missing on the eve of her 16th birthday. In the movie, her age is changed to 16 (probably because Brown is a 16-year-old in real life). As far as Enola's smarts and general detecting skills go, she's the same character. But because this is a movie, and movie things have to happen in it, there's one slightly more noticeable change: In the film, Enola is pretty well versed in a variety of martial arts. It's not that Book Enola can't handle herself, but a penchant for battle is definitely not a defining aspect of her. As Enola says, “I was taught to watch and listen. I was taught to fight. This is what my mother made me for.”

Overemphasizing Holmesian characters' fighting skills is nothing new for film adaptations set in this beloved Victorian universe. Although Sherlock does take on some ruffians (“The Solitary Cyclist”) and wrestle people using the martial art Doyle calls “baritsu” (“The Empty House”), it's not as though he was like that in the original short story. And yet in the 2009 movie *Sherlock Holmes*, that's exactly what Robert Downey Jr.'s Sherlock seems to do. Brown's Enola doesn't go full Enola on them. Enola is much more physically active than the character is in Springer's books.

Enola's relationship with Sherlock is much cozier than it is in Springer's books.

Although both Mycroft and Sherlock eventually come to view Enola as an equal in Springer's sixth book, *The Case of the Gypsy Good-bye*, at the start of the series, Sherlock is dismissive of his sister. In this way, Springer's books take a somewhat one-note approach to Sherlock's character, casting him mainly as a sexist and egomaniac. At the end of the first Springer book, Sherlock says this of Enola: “Thoughtful and imaginative, perhaps, but certainly no stranger to the weakness, the irrationality, the selfishness of the human race.”

But Henry Cavill's Sherlock in *Enola Holmes* is *nothing* like this. From the very beginning, he is supportive of Enola and attempts to help her where she needs it. In the majority of the Springer books, Sherlock certainly *likes* Enola more than his older brother Mycroft, but their overall relationship is much chillier. In the original canon, Sherlock is a big brother in a Victorian period piece might; he's aloof and brooding, but he's basically a good person. Cavill's Sherlock isn't a terrible interpretation of Doyle's or Springer's, but he is a little more low-key than most onscreen Sherlocks. He smiles a lot, he barely smokes, he never mentions shooting up, and his best friend, Watson, is nowhere in sight. In Springer's novels, Dr. Watson is very much around. In *The Case of the Bizarre Bouquets*, Enola even convinces Sherlock to help her. In the Enola Holmes book series, it takes five installments for Sherlock and his sister to make peace. In the movie, their estrangement happens mostly off

saunters in, you know he's going to be a nice Sherlock.

And it works, sure. But perhaps the most arresting thing about Nancy Springer's books is that Sherlock Holmes is perceived — at least for a good ch and Enola stands in great contrast to him. In *Enola Holmes*, the Netflix movie, he's mostly just a woke, Victorian Superman. Which, in a film that is

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GOOD ONE PODCAST | 2:32 P.M.

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10:55 A.M.

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10:38 A.M.

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1:58 A.M.

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