

Foreword, *The Chronicles of Solar Pons*

Alan J. Hubin, Dec. 13, 1972

I met August Derleth but once, during the summer of 1970, when I chanced to drive through central Wisconsin and stopped one bright Sunday afternoon at the home he had built and personalized. My first impression of him was of openness and friendliness – he had paper in his typewriter and a story to write, but he gave me several hours for talk on subjects criminous and otherwise.

My second strong impression was gained from a chronological display of his books on shelves in his office. What astonishing literary versatility it demonstrated! And so much greater thus the loss to the world of letters when August Derleth died in July of 1971.

Shortly before that visit Derleth had asked me to write the introduction to *The Chronicles of Solar Pons*, then in the writing stage. I was a bit diffident, for previous Pons books had introductions by notable luminaries in detective fiction. Derleth pressed his invitation and I accepted – but there could be little doubt who would be more honored, me or *Chronicles*.

Now, years and August Derleth's passing having intervened, I had before me the typescript of *Chronicles*. I settled myself confidently to the pleasures I knew to be in store, and when the last page was turned I leaned back in my chair fully rewarded, rested my eyes, and contemplated the remarkable career of the consulting detective known as Solar Pons...

...It seemed I walked a country lane. A crispness in the air suggested autumn, but the sun cast clear shadows of the tall stand of timber on my left.

A few steps further along brought into view a simple cottage, nestled against the trees on the edges of a large meadow. As I came even with the tidy structure, the figure of a man moved toward me from it on the cobblestone walk that communicated with the road I trod. I had the curious sensation of an appointment fulfilled.

The man was clearly old, but his movements were sure and his eyes bright. And I could not mistake that aquiline face.

"Mr. Solar Pons!" I cried.

He seemed to know me, and led the way into the cottage. After waving me to a chair, he first cautioned me about disclosing the whereabouts of his Sussex retirement home. Inspector Jamison, he told me, knew where he was, as well of course as Dr. Parker and his brother Bancroft. But he did not wish to be bothered with trivial matters, and largely his time was devoted to what had latterly become a rather abiding interest of his.

I raised inquisitive brows, and he nodded at a row of double white boxes visible several hundred feet away through a window.

A little hobby, he said, shared with a professional colleague not far away.

“Am I to understand that we will not have the pleasure of more of your investigations?” I asked. “The Pontine Canon must close at 68 accounts?”

He nodded, and said that while many inquiries not without trifling points of interest had gone unreported, Dr. Parker had found the services of his literary agent so felicitous that going on without him was not to be contemplated.

A regrettable but not altogether surprising state of affairs, I agreed. Perhaps, I suggested, Mr. Derleth had played an important role in maintaining the leaven of fun and good adventure throughout the more than four decades during which Dr. Parker made reports available to an insatiable public. Nowhere in the canon could I recall a sense of pure enjoyment more evident than in “The Adventure of the Orient Express” and “The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians” in *Chronicles*.

A reminiscent gleam grew in his eyes, and he leaned forward.

“Let me tell you about several even more curious and spirited affairs,” he said...

And I awoke.