



(Above) Nigel Stock as the curmudgeonly Waxflatter in *Young Sherlock Holmes*; (right) Nicholas Rowe and Alan Cox as the youthful Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES

What could Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John H. Watson have been like when (and if) they were boys?

Steven Spielberg was intrigued by the idea and thought it contained great possibilities for a movie. He called in his young ace screenwriter, Chris Columbus ("Gremlins", "Goonies"), and gave him only the film's title, "Young Sherlock



Holmes, and the instruction, "Do what you like with it."

"It could have been young Sherlock in Los Angeles in 1985," said Columbus, "but I had been inspired by the stage version of *Nicholas Nickleby* (and) loved David Lean's films of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. I wanted to get that flavor back into films."

Setting his story in 1870 London, and immersing himself in research on Victorian history and mores, Columbus spent nine months writing his script. "It required a lot of care because Holmes is a literary legend," he pointed out. "I did not want to upset his devotees, some of whom believe Holmes was a real person who actually lived."

The story involves its schoolboy heroes, not only in solving a mystery, but also in an adventure with ele-

ments of the supernatural.

Sherlock Holmes and John Watson meet at school, an encounter in which Holmes proves he already possesses impressive powers of deduction: he describes accurately his new acquaintance Watson's every interest, and even his family background, just by observing him. The two quickly become friends.

Soon after, the two pals set out to investigate a strange series of deaths of respected older London citizens, one of whom is a somewhat befuddled professor at their school. With the help of the professor's beautiful niece, they set out to solve the crimes, which seem to be linked to a menacing religious cult.

Tall, dark-haired Nicholas Rowe, the 18-year-old son of a member of the House of Commons, was selected from thousands who auditioned

for the part to play Holmes. Two young cast members come from acting families: Alan Cox, son of British actor Brian Cox, plays Watson, and Sophie Ward, daughter of Simon Ward (*Young Winston*) is Elizabeth, the pretty young niece of the deceased professor. A host of distinguished adult actors, including Anthony Higgins of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, round out the cast.

Barry Levinson—who had already received praise for a film about young people, *Diner*, —is directing. His most recent film release, *The Natural*, about a baseball player with extraordinary talent, demonstrates he is equally at ease with a story having magical overtones.

Young Sherlock Holmes has taken advantage of the authentic locations available in England, shooting many scenes at historic Eton. "When I

went on the set to see Barry directing the scene of Watson meeting Holmes for the first time (shot at Eton)," said Columbus, "I felt as if I were Watson walking into that dormitory. It was precisely as I had imagined it."

Columbus was also excited that director Levinson had filmed his screenplay with little rewriting. "This film is the one baby (of his projects for Spielberg) I can almost call my own," he said.

Director of Photography Stephen Goldblatt says *Young Sherlock Holmes* makes, "No attempt at reality. The characters are almost Dickensian. It is 95 minutes, or thereabouts, of non-stop action set in mid-Victorian London."

Young Sherlock Holmes, a Paramount release, will open nationwide in December. ♦