

## Shane Black Productions Press Release

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# Shane Black's "Doc Savage" Literally Going to the Dogs!

On the heels of the announcement that the Sony Pictures production based on his 2018 **Doc Savage** script remains in "Development Hell" with no end in sight, as it has been for a decade now (production began in 2016), due a deadlock between licensor Condé Nast, licensee Sony Production, and would-be licensee Shane Black Productions, scriptwriter Shane Black has had enough but is *still* determined to bring the character to the screen *without* a license through a loophole in the copyright and trademark laws.

Condé Nast asserts that its licenses are neither refundable nor transferable, Sony will not relinquish its license without reimbursement for all the money sunk into the project to date including the license fee, and Shane Black Productions can afford a new license or reimbursement of the existing one but not both. Condé Nast, which gets its license fee in advance and is indemnified against losses by the licensee but nevertheless entitled to a share of any profits that may accrue, says this is a matter that the competing licensees must work it out between themselves, and Shane Black and his production company just wants to finish what he started a decade ago.

He has decided not to make a licensed **Doc Savage** but instead make use of the "Fair Use Doctrine" to make a whimsical homage of the licensed character under his own copyright and trademark that everyone will immediately recognize as such and enjoy in the spirit of joy in which it is being made. It's not a parody or spoof of the licensed character, but a celebration of him and everything for which he stands.

Perhaps as a result of the popularity and success of Disney's **Zootopia** (2016), its sequel **Zootopia 2** (2025), and all the other anthropomorphic animal animations released to date, the film will now be an animated feature in which all of the characters are anthropomorphic dogs, with character designs inspired by the famous "Poker Playing Dogs" oil paintings of Cassius Marcellus "Cash" Coolidge.

The film will be the introduction of ... **"Dog" Savage!**

Asked to comment on the sudden turn in the production's direction, Black said, "The important thing is to be true to the character. If doing it as a CGI animated feature is what it takes to get it off the page and onto the screen, so be it. And, since so much can be done within the computer nowadays, it may even make production quicker and easier." The

script will require a complete rewrite to adapt it from live action to animation, which will make it entirely original from start to finish.

Charles Mondry and his writing partner Anthony Bagarozzi, who co-scripted the original **Doc Savage** screenplay for Sony on which the new production is based, have yet to respond.

“This may make the character accessible to a wider audience than would an **Indiana Jones** style live-action film, especially with a fifth film in that series in the offing. And there’s a precedent for a ‘funny animal’ treatment of an iconic literary character. Back when we were all in college, now-legendary Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki produced an animated film called **Sherlock Hound** that impressed all of us for both its respect for the characters and attention to period detail.”

**Sherlock Hound** (1984), called *Meitantei Houndo Gekijouban (The Great Detective Holmes: The Movie)* in Japanese, was the first of several animated features by Miyazaki that celebrate quaint *Fin de Siècle* steam mechanics in a way that evokes optimism about the future and progressive ideals and may have helped spark the “steampunk” genre. His subsequent films include the animated classics **Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind** (1985), **Laputa: Castle in the Sky** (1986), **Kiki’s Delivery Service** (1989), **Porco Rosso** (1992) and **Howl’s Moving Castle** (2004).

**Dog Savage** appears to be going for the same sort of “retro” style, but with streamline Art Deco designs reminiscent of the 1939 New York World’s Fair, which also informed **Batman the Animated Movie: Mask of the Phantasm** (1993). There’s an offshoot of steampunk called “dieselpunk” that also channels that Thirties “The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow” vibe that made the original musical **Annie** (1982) such a success, with a touch of Forties “film noir” like **The Maltese Falcon** (1941). That had worked for **Who Framed Roger Rabbit?** (1988), although that famously combined animation with live-action.

Can it work entirely in CGI animation? Shane Black Productions is not only betting that it can, but also that it can do so better than admittedly computer-enhanced live-action. Mixing live actors and CGI always seems to make everything look gritty, gloomy, and gray no matter how upbeat the actors play a given scene, which may have doomed the similarly-themed **Sky Captain and The World of Tomorrow** (2004).

Purely CGI animated films like **Zootopia** seem bright and bouncy no matter how dark the tone of the story may turn. Befitting their Depression Era origins, the **Doc Savage** stories are all about optimism in the midst of great turmoil, so going with anthropomorphic dogs romping their way through high adventure amid an Art Deco ambience may indeed lift

the production out of the quagmire in which it's languished for the seventeen years since it was first announced in 2009.

There's not much hard information about the new production yet, as Sony has thus far only released a single publicity still, which heads this column, showing the fully-rendered CGI animation of **Dog Savage**'s crew of experts, the "Furry-ous Five."



In the center, archaeology professor "Johnny" (a German Shepherd) uses his academic knowledge of fine art to create a composite ID portrait of a villain that the other four glimpsed in passing (a weasel-like Greyhound ironically named "Sunshine").

From left to right behind "Johnny" are industrial chemist "Monk" (an English Bulldog), dapper attorney "Ham" (a Rough Collie), construction engineer "Renny" (a Saint Bernard) and electrical genius "Long Tom" (an English Springer Spaniel).

**Dog Savage** himself is portrayed as a golden-eyed bronze-coated Doberman Pinscher whose visage and body language will suggest "The Mighty Mutt of Bronze" through a combination of motion capture and CGI. Sony has released only a preliminary conceptual drawing of the character, not an actual CGI rendering.



It's unclear at this stage whether or not **Dog Savage**'s feisty female cousin "Pat" will appear in the film even in passing but, if so, she is portrayed as a Golden Retriever.

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