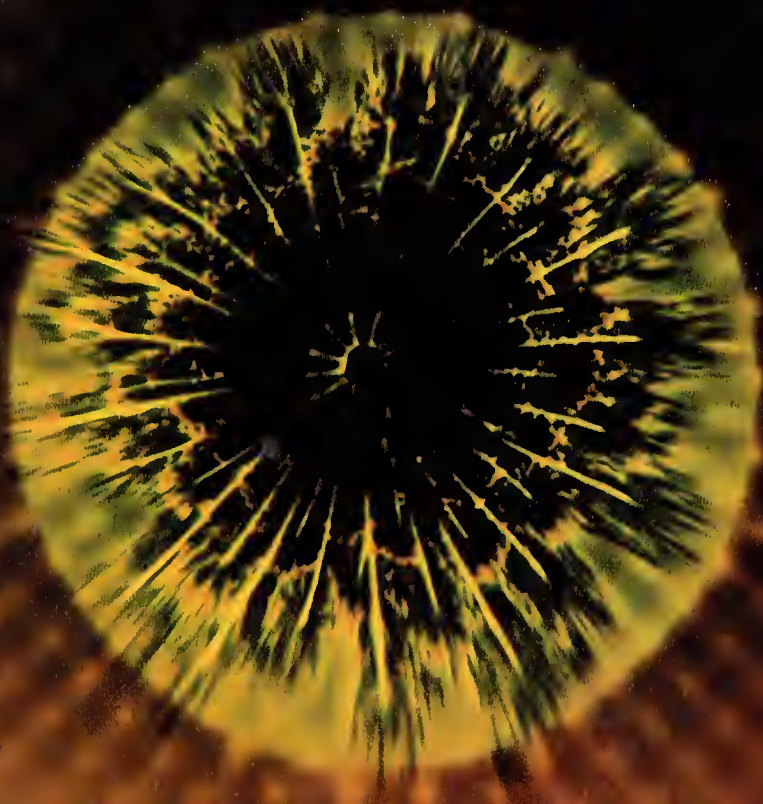


NEW WORLDS 4

THE SCIENCE FICTION
QUARTERLY

Edited by **MICHAEL MOORCOCK**



NEW WORLDS 4

Edited by Michael Moorcock

NEW WORLDS

has achieved an enviable and well deserved reputation as Britain's foremost science fiction magazine. It now makes its appearance as a quarterly publication in paperback book form.

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THE SHORES OF DEATH

THE WINDS OF LIMBO

THE BLOOD RED GAME

NEW WORLDS 1, 2 and 3 (Editor)

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CONTENTS

No. 4

THE PROBLEM OF SYMPATHY

M. John Harrison

7

THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE

B. J. Bayley

Illustrated by Mal Dean

14

SIMON

William Woodrow

33

THE FIRST OF TWO RAPED PROSPECTS

Marek Obtulowicz

Illustrated by Mal Dean

45

334

Thomas M. Disch

Illustrated by R. G. Jones

58

MAN IN TRANSIT

Alan Aumbry

156

THE LOCKED ROOM

John T. Sladek

166

WEIHNACHTABEND

Keith Roberts

Illustrated by Roberts

173.

ATTACK-ESCAPE

An interview with Alfred Bester

Charles Platt

211

THE AUTHORS

222

THE LOCKED ROOM

ANOTHER FENTON WORTH MYSTERY
by John Sladek

Fenton Worth instructed his valet Bozo to turn away all callers for the rest of the evening.

"I mean to spend a quiet evening with a good book," said the popular private detective, and indicated a new, calf-bound volume on the library table.

Bozo smirked, knowing what usually happened to all such "quiet evenings" in the life of a famous sleuth. "I imagine, sir," he said, "that a beautiful lady will burst in, begging you to save her life. That, or else Inspector Grogan will ask you to help recover the Stilton diamonds."

The well-known private dick smiled. "Not tonight, Bozo. I mean it. No calls of any kind. If it is a matter of life and death, as is usual, refer our caller to the police. Other cases I can look into in the morning. For now, I'm going to lock myself in the library, and I don't want to be disturbed."

With that, the eminent criminologist shooed his servant from the room, turned the key and settled into his favorite Morris chair with the "good book". It was a detection novel, entitled *The Locked Room*.

"*The Locked Room*, eh? That should be of considerable interest," he mused, toying with his letter opener. This curious instrument was actually a Moro weapon, an example of that knife with a wavy blade familiar to cross-

word buffs as a *kriis*. Opening the volume, Fenton used the *kriis* to slit a few pages, then began to read.

The plot of this novel, shorn of its ornaments, misdirections and other fanciful elements, was simple: A man was found dead in a sealed room, locked from the inside. No one else was found in the room, and though the death was certainly a homicide, no weapon could be found. Suspects were abundant, yet how could any of them have done it?

Fenton had met a great many such cases in real life; indeed, they formed the bulk of his murder investigations. He had opened locked rooms containing corpses which had been done to death by strangulation, shooting, stabbing, poison, smothering, drowning, burning, being chopped to bits, electrocution, by the action of deadly snakes and spiders – and far worse.

A few of such cases involved rooms which were not really locked at all. These included rooms with secret panels and one room where the midget assassin lay hidden in a chest. Fenton had left all such “cheating” cases to the police.

More interesting were the cases where the rooms were really locked, but ingeniously locked from the outside. One killer, having simply locked the door and concealed the key in his hand, helped smash a panel of the door to get into the room. Then he reached through the panel and “found” the key in the lock. Others relied on clever systems of string, pins, wires and so on, to drop latch-bars, shoot bolts and turn locks from outside the door. One killer simply removed the door hinges, replacing them after his grim business inside.

In other cases the room was locked, and from the inside, but it was not utterly unimpregnable. Poison gas might be introduced by a ventilator, as, indeed, might an adder. Ice bullets might be fired through the keyhole to kill, then melt, leaving no trace of the weapon. Others used poison darts fired through an otherwise inaccessible window, bombs down the chimney and so on. In one curious case a man was stabbed through the wall itself, with a very long, thin, sharp sword.

There were a number of “funny contrivance” cases.

These invariably concerned machines, hidden about the rooms which, having done their deeds, became to all appearances innocent furniture again. Some were set off by the victims themselves, some by remote control and some by clockwork. Men were shot by telephones, blown up by hearing aids, stabbed by clocks, strangled by stethoscopes and ripped to pieces by typewriters. In this category Fenton placed his interesting "Case of the Freudian Outlook", where a man was crushed to death between the red-hot iron walls of a gimmicked room.

He paused to cut a few more pages. This mystery, *The Locked Room*, was the most baffling he'd yet encountered, and nothing like any of the others.

It was certainly not like the elaborate suicide in "The Mystery of the Yellow Step", where the victim hanged himself with an especially knotted and weighted rope. When the door to the room was broken in, this noose undid itself, deposited the body on the floor, and vanished out the window into (for this was in Venice) the Grand Canal.

Nor did this case resemble "The Orchid Piano Mystery", where the victim locked himself in a room coincidentally full of broken furniture and other signs of a struggle, fainted and cracked his head on the fender. That case had given Fenton some food for thought, as had the related "Mauve Marimba Mystery". There the supposed victim had merely suffered an epileptic seizure, smashed up the room, and ended by kicking himself in the face until dead (this epileptic was also a dancer).

Fenton's meditations were here interrupted by Bozo, who came in with a tray of toast and cocoa.

"I was just thinking over some of my old 'locked-room' cases, Bozo," said the renowned gumshoe. "I must confess that real-life cases are a whale of a lot easier than detective fiction. This novel has me stymied, so far." And he outlined the story for his valet.

"It sounds tough, sir," said Bozo. "Reminds one of the 'Case of the Bashful Bimbo'."

"No, I think you're thinking of the 'Vast Duck Mystery', aren't you, Bozo? Where it finally turned out that the victim had been stabbed with a hatpin at the ambassador's reception, amid a roomful of people. He wasn't even aware

of the stabbing himself. He'd gone into another room, locked himself in, and then the slow leakage from his heart finally caught up with him."

"Like I've caught up with you," laughed Inspector Grogan, strolling in. "I came over on the chance of getting you to help on the Stilton diamonds case. I found this young lady outside. Claims her life's in danger."

The young lady, a beautiful blonde with a black eye, seemed too frightened to speak. Next came Claude Elliott, the millionaire playboy, attired in his customary black evening wear, a monocle twinkling in his eye. "I say, old sport," he drawled, "d'you think you could do anything about it? Someone seems to have kidnapped Pater. His entire private car has vanished from its train. Deucedly awkward, what?" Young Elliott expected no answer to this question.

"Scuse me, mistah Wort'," said a jockey, ducking into view from behind Elliott's scarlet-lined cape. "Honeymarch has been heisted!"

"Honeymarch stolen!" echoed the astonished shamus. This famous filly had won many times her weight in gold, as had her sire, My White Dream, which Fenton had earlier saved from doping in—

"The Case of the Mona Lisa Moth," breathed Bozo.

"Exactly," Fenton said. "Get rid of some of these people — all of them, Bozo. I want to do some hard thinking."

Bozo gently but firmly pushed them all from the library; the debutante and the B-girl, the Brovnian ambassador and the gum-chewing taxi driver, the business tycoon and the spirit medium, the jockey, the playboy, the cop and the black-eyed blonde.

"In 'The Case of the Oddest Occurrence,'" Fenton mused, "the trick was to make it seem as if the victim were dead before he really was. The killer got him into a room and drugged, and managed to get the room locked. Then he feigned alarm, convinced us there was something afoot, and broke the door down to get in. He rushed in ahead of us, I recall, exclaiming at the (fictitious) sight of the victim's throat, cut from ear to ear. And even while he was exclaiming, he was cutting that throat — an instant before the rest of us saw it!"

"It was another kettle of fish, sir," said Bozo, "in the case you called 'Murder Galore'."

"True enough, Bozo. In that, as in many cases, the ruse was to get the rest of us believing the victim to be still alive, when he had already been done to death. In the case you mention, this was accomplished by means of a phonographic recording of the victim's voice. Other cases involved the use of mirrors, disguises, death-masks and even ventriloquism. Yet *The Locked Room* is not one of this type.

"Nor does it resemble the more 'bizarre' cases, such as 'The Wrong Hotel Room Mystery', or the simpler ones, such as 'The Case of the Gonsel's Gardenia'. In the former the whole plot hinged upon an elaborate switch of door number plates; in the latter, the killer only pretended the door was locked, and held it shut as he feigned battering it open."

Bozo withdrew, and the celebrated crime-solver locked and bolted the door. There remained only the pages of the final chapter to be cut, but he could not yet bring himself to break their seal. Surely he could guess the ending in advance of reading it! Surely, in all his experience, there must be one case relevant to solving this tangle.

Yet he had covered all categories: The secret passage or panel; the string-locked door; the ice bullet; and so on. There remained for consideration only one case, the strange "Case of the Parched Adjutant."

THE CASE OF THE PARCHED ADJUTANT

Another Fenton Worth Mystery

The victim was a retired military gentleman of sober and regular habits, an ardent anti-vivisectionist. He spent several hours each day in his study, writing his memoirs and anti-vivisection pamphlets, or perhaps just gazing out over the vast heath of which his window commanded an excellent prospect. When he was not writing, he could generally be found upon that heath, strolling and meditating. He had no relatives living, very little money, and a devoted housekeeper who was a chimpanzee.

On the day in question a circus had pitched on the heath, and the adjutant had, according to the housekeeper, gone

to see it – for the second time. Worried at his absence, she finally called the police and Fenton Worth. No one at the circus had seen him. In a search of the house, they broke in the door of his study.

The study had only one door, to which the adjutant had the only key, and its only window was inaccessible. The furniture consisted of a desk, a chair and a sofa. The adjutant was found lying on the sofa, strangled to death – with finger marks clear on his throat – and oddly parched. The door key was in his pocket.

The study window was open, but Fenton soon proved that it was inaccessible, for it lay forty feet above a mire of wet sand. This mire would neither support a ladder nor any climbing device, and its unbroken surface indicated that nothing had come within a hundred feet of the house on that side. It was further impossible to lower oneself from the roof by a rope, for the roof was made of treacherous rotten thatching – which likewise had not been disturbed.

A great deal of suspicion fell upon the housekeeper, as the adjutant's only heir. But an examination of the corpse, together with evidence from the adjutant's pamphlets and memoirs, established the true circumstances, as Fenton explained:

The adjutant had been strangled at the circus, bundled into a cannon, and fired through the window to land upon the sofa. This was confirmed by the parching, and powder burns on the corpse's feet. Certain details in the adjutant's memoirs and pamphlets showed that he had uncovered a vicious vivisection racket running behind the scenes at the circus, and was about to subject this sordid business to the light of public scrutiny. On his first visit to the circus, he had recognized an old enemy, an ex-Nazi artillery officer notorious during the war for his torture of animals, chiefly puppies and kittens. The adjutant's discovery of what the lions were fed completed his inquiry; the rest was duck soup, as he'd have said.

Confronted with this evidence, the Human Cannonball broke down and confessed, sobbing in half-coherent German.

*

"Hmmm" said Fenton. "Even that case doesn't help me here. Maybe I should re-read the novel, to see what clues I've missed." The well-known peeper leafed back through the book.

"Say, here's an anomaly!" he exclaimed. "The author tells us on page one the door is locked, and here on page three it so manifestly isn't! What can be the explanation of that?"

Suddenly the world-famed private eye sat bolt upright. "Aha! The author says the door is locked, *but we have only his word for it*. The pieces of the jigsaw are beginning to fall into place, now. The author may in fact have *staged* the entire murder to make money from his own fictionalization of it! So the name of the killer must be—"

But the publicly-acclaimed private investigator will never name me. He'll be found tomorrow morning, stabbed to death, in a room locked from the inside. The *kriis* will have vanished.

Thus begins my novel of detection, another Fenton Worth Mystery,

THE END

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