

April

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"Scientifiction"

Stories by
H.G. Wells
Cecil B. White
David H. Keller M.D.



JULES VERNE'S TOMBSTONE AT AMIENS
PORTRAYING HIS IMMORTALITY

AMAZING STORIES

April, 1928
Vol. 3, No. 1

EDITORIAL & GENERAL OFFICES: 230 Fifth Ave., New York City
Published by Experimenter Publishing Company, Inc.

(H. GERNSBACK, Pres.; S. GERNSBACK, Treas.)
Publishers of SCIENCE & INVENTION, RADIO NEWS,
RADIO LISTENERS' GUIDE, FRENCH HUMOR

Owners of Broadcast Station WRNY

In Our April Issue:

A Story of the Days to Come (A Serial in 2 parts). Part I By H. G. Wells	6
The Yeast Men By David H. Keller, M.D.	26
The Way of a Dinosaur By Harley S. Aldinger	35
Baron Munchhausen's Scientific Adventures By Hugo Gernsback	38
The Miracle of the Lily By Clare Winger Harris	48
The Ancient Horror By Hal Grant	56
The Master Key By Charles S. Wolfe	67
The Return of the Martians By Cecil B. White	70

Our Cover

this month represents the subject matter in our new scientific contest offering \$300.00 in prizes. For details, see Editorial, page 5.

In Our Next Issue:

A STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME (A Serial in 2 parts) (Part II), by H. G. Wells. Now that the author has established his mechanical changes and differences and the corresponding variations and modifications in the laws of the land, which we might well enough expect to find in the days of the future, he turns his attention, with equal success, to the inevitable changes in the trend and mode of human living in this age of mechanical concentration. It is an absorbing study in psychology.

FOUR DIMENSIONAL ROBBERIES, by Bob Olsen. If a four dimensional forceps could extract gall stones from the human body without any operation, why couldn't it be used for other material things—banknotes and jewelry, for instance? The far-reaching effects of such a discovery as a four-dimensional instrument can hardly be foretold to any appreciable degree. The fields in which such an instrument might be used are necessarily many, and our author, by this time well known to all our readers, has proved himself the possessor of a fertile mind with a turn for good writing.

BARON MUENCHHAUSEN'S SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURES, by Hugo Gernsback. As might be expected, the first novelty of being on Mars and the strangeness of the place wears off very quickly, and in the next instalments we find our friends, the resourceful Baron and his scientific traveling friend, learning all about Mars and the Martians. The Baron's periodic radio communications furnish a source of real scientific information.

THE OCTOPUS CYCLE, by Irvin Lester and Fletcher Pratt. Every once in a while we hear from explorers and entomologists of good repute, stories of the extermination even of human life in certain localities of the jungle, by seemingly intelligent and organized insects or animals of the smaller variety. This story, about a highly-developed animal of the Mollusk variety, is made especially interesting because a journalist and a scientist have collaborated on it.

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AMAZING STORIES is published on the 5th of each preceding month. There are 12 numbers per year. Subscription price is \$2.50 a year in U. S. and possessions. Canada and foreign countries \$3.00 a year U. S. coin as well as U. S. stamps accepted (no foreign coin or stamps). Single copies, 25 cents each. All communications and contributions to this journal should be addressed to Editor AMAZING STORIES, 230 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. Unaccepted contributions cannot be returned unless full postage has been included. ALL accepted contributions are paid for on publication.

AMAZING STORIES Monthly. Entered as second class matter March 10, 1926, by the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Title Registered U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1927, by E. P. Co., Inc., New York. The text and illustrations of this Magazine are copyrighted and must not be reproduced without giving full credit to the publication. AMAZING STORIES is for sale at all newsstands in the United States and Canada. European Agents, S. J. Wise Et Cie, 40 Place Verte, Antwerp, Belgium. Printed in U. S. A.

General Advertising Dept., 230 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

L. F. McCLURE, 720 Cass Street, Chicago, Ill.
DAVIES, DILLON & KELLY, 15 West 10th St., Kansas City, Mo.
T. F. MAGRANE, Park Square Bldg., Boston, Kans.

HARRY E. HYDE, 548 Drexel Building, Philadelphia, Pa.
A. J. NORRIS HILL CO., 5 Third St., San Francisco, Calif.
412 W. 6th St., Los Angeles, Cal.; Leary Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

The MASTER KEY

by Charles S. Wolfe



"A master key for a bolt," Fenner said quietly. "A nice little electro magnet and some lamp cord. Simple, wasn't it. Hook right into the lamp socket and shoot the bolts about at will."

FOLLOWED Fenner through the door of Davidson's office. We found the worthy Chief of Police seated behind his desk, from which vantage point he greeted us with an unusually cheerful "good morning."

He seemed in rare good humor, and I noted the quizzical uplifting of Fenner's eyebrows as he advanced to the desk and leaned lazily against it.

"We received your message, Chief," drawled Fenner, "and we came right down. What have we now—murder, mayhem, larceny or abduction?"

Davidson laughed outright. Involuntarily I started. It was the first time that I had heard a laugh out of the usually taciturn chief. In fact, I firmly believed that the very farthest he would ever get in that direction would be a broad grin. And I realized that something unusually humorous must have come up to betray the police head into open mirth.

"None of the bunch you so glibly named, Joe," chuckled Davidson, "in fact, we have nothing. Everything is going nicely. I don't need you at all. But I've got a bird in my private office there who needs you badly. I'll say he does. Oh, boy! Wait till you hear his story!"

"Sounds interesting," admitted Fenner. "What is it? Usually obedient daughter eloped with the family chauffeur—something of that sort?"

Davidson rose. "Come on into the office and let him tell you the story himself," he said over his shoulder, as he led the way; and with curiosity aroused we followed after him into the next room.

Seated at the table was a well dressed young man whose face bore no trace of the mirth that seemed to have gotten the best of Davidson. As we entered, he glanced up quickly, and I imagined I saw the shadow of disappointment cross his features as Davidson introduced Fenner.

THE cleverness of this story like the cleverness of a great many things lies largely in its simplicity. The shooting of bolts whether for opening or closing a door involves an impenetrable mystery until it is elucidated by so simple a solution that we must wonder it did not occur to everybody on the first reading of the story. Read the story and see what the Master Key was, and see how surprised you will be at the simplicity of it all. You will even find a Mr. Watson in this story—not the one of Sherlock Holmes fame however.

"Meet Mr. Fenner and his friend," said Davidson. "Joe, this is Mr. Watson, son of John Watson, who has the ice plant. Fenner here, Mr. Watson, is the man I think you want. Tell him your story. You'll excuse me, for I'm rather busy this morning."

Davidson left us, and as we seated ourselves across the table from Watson, I began studying him covertly, for he was a well-known figure around our town. Son of one of the wealthiest of our citizens, he was prominent in all the big social activities of the "upper set," and a member of all the exclusive clubs. His name was constantly appearing in the public prints, and I made the most of this opportunity to get a line on the man.

He spoke in low, cultured tones, not looking directly at us, and toying with a paper knife in a nervous fashion as he talked.

"I find myself in a most embarrassing situation, Mr. Fenner," he said, "and Davidson tells me that he is unable to give me any assistance, because the matter cannot be considered as legitimately in his line. I suppose he's right. Also, I admit that I am showing poor sportsmanship in asking aid in this business, but you will understand that it is not the money involved that leads me to unfair play. I am in a fair way to become the laughing stock of the city, and at all costs this must be prevented."

"And what is the difficulty, Mr. Watson?" Fenner asked politely, as the clubman paused.

"It is a silly bet that I was foolish enough to make at the Lynx Club with young Fair yesterday afternoon. We were discussing some of the popular books of the day, and finally worked around to a detective story which is having quite a run. Maybe you've read the thing—chap is murdered in a room to which there is no apparent ingress possible without detection—that sort of stuff. I remarked that all this kind of business was drivel—that in everyday life such things could not, and did not, take place. Young Fair, with all the romanticism of youth, defended the writer and his clan. Said that things occur in reality that outdo the marvelous happenings of fiction. The dispute grew rather hotter than either of us liked, and—well, we ended in a bet.

"Fair offered to bet me five thousand dollars that he personally could demonstrate to a selected committee that the mysterious entrance or exit from a room as described in this book was quite possible. I accepted the wager.

"The committee was selected, and the conditions agreed on. He was to enter a room from which no unaided exit could apparently be made. He was to be allowed the entire night in which to effect his escape. If he succeeded, I agreed to find him within 48 hours, and to explain how he got away or forfeit the wager.

"The arrangements were made, and he entered the chosen room at eight last evening. This morning we forced an entrance to that room. He has disappeared!"

Fenner made no effort to conceal his grin. "Put one over, eh? Any idea how he managed it?"

"Not the slightest," confessed Watson, dejectedly. "Apparently it is impossible. Yet he is gone. My forty-eight hours are slipping away rapidly, and it seems as if I am slated to lose. I don't regard the money at all, you will understand. I would give the little devil that much if he asked for it. It is the

idea of having the young jackanapod hoodwink me in this fashion that makes me determined to find him if I can. Yet I haven't any idea where to begin. Now I am making you this offer. Solve this riddle for me, and the money I win you may have. Of course, I rely on you to keep secret the fact that you aided me."

"That's a pretty stiff condition," objected Fenner, "for how I am to get a look at the scene of this mysterious disappearance without someone noting my presence there, and how I am to trace the movements of Fair without following any trail he may have left without seeing it, is more than I can imagine."

"That you can easily do," returned Watson. "The selected room was in the Commercial House. This morning we forced the door, doing some little damage. I told the proprietor that I would send workmen around to make the necessary repairs. You may represent yourselves as locksmiths without arousing any suspicion."

"Right," Fenner agreed, cheerfully, "and now, Mr. Watson, give me a concise account of Fair's last movements."

"We finally chose a room on the twelfth floor. Fair accepted this room without comment, and it suited me. It opens into a long corridor, which leads to the elevator. It is much like the other rooms on that floor. The reason that it appealed to me was that it was situated quite a distance from the fire-escape. In fact, it is inconceivable that Fair passed out through the windows of the rooms."

"Granting that he had nerve to venture out over the abyss, couldn't he reach the roof?" queried Fenner, quietly.

Watson shook his head in negation. "Three stories above, is the out-jutting cornice, you know. Practically no hand or foothold on the surface of the wall. I don't imagine a cat could make it. I think we can eliminate the windows. The hotel proprietor assures me that there are no secret passages, spaces between the walls or anything of that sort in the building. I take his word for it. Now as to the doors. There are two. The one leading into the room from the corridor by which Fair entered, and one within the room in the left wall, leading into an adjoining room, which also has a door opening into the corridor.

"Both these doors have ordinary locks, not dead latches. For this reason, I suppose, they have also bolts. There is a bolt on the inside of the door which opens on the corridor, and a bolt on the door within the room. There is a bolt on the other side of that door, by the way, within the adjoining room. I looked this morning. And for the occasion, we put a bolt on the outside of the corridor door.

"When Fair entered the room we shot this outside bolt. He shot the one on the inside. That's why we had to force our way in this morning. That bolt on the inside was still in place. So also were both bolts on the other door. And there you are."

Fenner arose. "Your description of the conditions is good, Mr. Watson," he said, "and now Bill and I will become locksmiths and go down and see if we can do anything for you. If I am able to help you out, I'll call Davidson on the 'phone."

"Do that," agreed Watson, "and remember, the money is all yours if you can successfully unravel this mystery."

Fenner nodded, and we passed out, leaving Watson seated at the table. As we passed through the outer office, Davidson favored us with a wink and a grimace to which Fenner replied by forming with his hands a very creditable imitation of the long ears of a mule.

We made our way to Fenner's house, attired ourselves in working clothes, took a few tools, and caught a downtown car. As we rode, I ventured to question Fenner, hoping that he might have a possible solution to the riddle. He proved non-committal.

"Wait, Bill," he said, "until we have had a first-hand look at the scene of this fourth-dimensional chap's activities. Let us form no theories until we know all that is to be known about the case."

"Watson's description was quite lucid," I replied, "and if things are just as he described them, the trick seems impossible to me. Fair couldn't have flown, you know."

"No matter how impossible it may seem," rejoined Fenner, "you are face to face with the fact that when they broke into the room this morning Fair was gone. That, I take it, is proof enough that it is quite possible. Here we are."

On stating our errand to the manager, we had no trouble in securing admission to the room, and the departing bell-hop left us alone in the room from which Fair had contrived to find an exit.

The damage to the door was trivial and Fenner set about making the few necessary repairs. "You search carefully, Bill," he said, as he applied himself to the task of replacing the torn off bolt and its keeper, "and make sure that our young friend is not here, disguised as a bed or a clothes tree."

Ignoring the banter, I did make a thorough examination of the room, having come to the conclusion on the way down that Fair might just possibly have remained in the room, avoiding detection by some clever expedient.

My efforts were fruitless, however, for a search convinced me that he could not possibly be in hiding within the room.

Conditions were just as described by Watson. There was no disorder or sign of unusual physical effort to suggest a possible answer to the enigma. A glance out of the window assured me that Watson had spoken the truth. Just to fancy a human being clinging to the surface of that wall at that height was sickening, and I felt convinced that Fair had not made the fire-escape. Yet the bolted doors seemed proof that he had not passed through either of them, for it is possible to lock a door after you, but hardly so to shoot a bolt inside of a closed door. Also the fact that there were bolts on the outside of each of these doors made it look like a rather difficult proposition for him to have opened them at all, let alone having bolted them behind him.

The ceiling, examined from the vantage point of a chair, was as fruitless of clues as the previously scrutinized floor.

"And now," said Fenner, after these details had been attended to, "we will take a leaf from Watson's book, and have a look at the adjoining room."

By means of an ordinary skeleton key we readily got into this chamber through the corridor door. I

prepared myself for another thorough search, but Fenner stayed me, "No use, Bill," he said; "let's go."

Mystified, and a little rebellious, I followed him from the room, and we made our way to the street.

As we walked along, Fenner hummed softly under his breath.

"It wouldn't have done any harm to have taken a look around that room," I grumbled, "on the off chance. While he's not likely there, we might have made sure."

"Nor would it have done us any good. Ah! there's a telephone booth. Wait here until I get Davidson and kiss that five thousand good-bye."

"Are you giving it up?" I demanded, amazed and hurt. "Let's go back and have another try."

"Not on your life," said Fenner, grimly. "Lead us not into temptation. If I go back there I may be tempted to collect that money."

"You'll never collect it this way," I demurred.

"My boy, I don't want to collect it," retorted Fenner. "I don't need money that badly. Watson's a short sport, or he would have seen this thing through himself, and not asked to buy the brains which he apparently lacks. Fair, on the other hand, has proved himself the possessor of some real gray matter. Get me? I'm going to be something of a good sport myself and not give him away."

I laughed, shortly. "Give him away," I echoed. "I hardly think you will!"

Fenner stopped short in his tracks, nettled. "Say, you ass," he said, sharply, "you don't think I'm stumped, do you? Let me tell you something, fellow. I know where that lad is at this very moment."

"You do?" I yelled. "Then where in blazes is he?"

"In that room that I wouldn't let you search, my boy," rejoined Fenner, complacently, gratified by my startled expression. "That's why I literally dragged you out. I didn't want you to flush the poor lad and spoil it for him. He was in that big closet, sticking out his forty-eight hours."

"He was?" I demanded, in amazement. "How did he get through that bolted door?"

"Easiest thing in the world," chuckled Fenner. "A cinch. He had the MASTER KEY."

"A master key for a bolt?" I demanded incredulously.

"A master key for a bolt," Fenner said quietly. "A nice little electro-magnet and some lamp cord. Simple, wasn't it. Hook right into the lamp socket and shoot the bolts about at will. He figured, and rightly enough, that the fact that all those bolts were found safely in their keepers would ward off all suspicion that he merely stepped into the adjoining room. He was right when he told Watson that things happen in every day life that are stranger than fiction. Maybe that worthy will believe him now."

"Good night!" I murmured, dazedly. "I never thought of that method—never suspected the trick."

"I did," replied Fenner, "and just the moment that I saw those bolts were of steel and not brass, I knew that I was right. Gee! Couldn't we have rigged up some station with those five thousand iron men!"