

The Sign Of Four

Arthur Conan Doyle

The Sign of Four: A Case Study in Early Sherlock Holmes Storytelling

Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Sign of Four" isn't just a captivating mystery; it's a cornerstone of detective fiction, showcasing the evolution of the Sherlock Holmes formula and influencing generations of crime writers. This delves into the story's intricacies, exploring its strengths and limitations while providing insights into its enduring appeal. **** Stepping into the fog-laden streets of Victorian London, we encounter Sherlock Holmes, the brilliant yet eccentric consulting detective, in his prime. "The Sign of Four," published in 1890, introduces us to a classic mystery revolving around a missing will, a hidden treasure, and a complex web of family secrets. More than just a thrilling tale, the story offers a glimpse into the**

social and cultural landscape of the era, underscoring themes of class, deception, and the power of observation. This analysis will examine the story's narrative structure, its portrayal of characters, and its enduring legacy in the genre.

A Masterful Narrative: "The Sign of Four" employs a structured narrative that builds suspense gradually. The opening act establishes the backdrop and introduces the key players, setting the stage for a complex puzzle. Doyle meticulously builds the plot with foreshadowing, red herrings, and careful exposition. This method of gradual revelation keeps the reader engaged and anticipates the climax. The pacing is well-managed, keeping the tension high without becoming overly convoluted.

Character Portrayal: The story excels in developing distinct characters, each contributing to the intricate tapestry of the narrative. Sherlock Holmes, in his classic form, embodies meticulous deduction and unwavering observation. Watson, his loyal companion, provides a crucial perspective, acting as the voice of reason and a bridge between the complexities of Holmes' thought process and the reader's understanding. The antagonists, notably the greedy and cunning Jonathan Small and his accomplices, add depth and complexity to the story.

Social and Cultural Context: **Published**

in the late Victorian era, "The Sign of Four" reflects the anxieties and preoccupations of the time. The story explores themes of class division, wealth disparity, and the allure of hidden treasures. The novel serves as a microcosm of the era's social stratification, reflecting the growing chasm between the upper classes and the lower classes in Victorian London. Advantages of "The Sign of Four": •

Compelling Plot: **The intricate plot, weaving together clues and red herrings, keeps the reader engaged until the satisfying conclusion.** • Iconic Character

Portrayal: **The creation of unforgettable characters, notably Holmes, elevates the story beyond a simple mystery.** • Enduring Relevance:

Themes of deduction, observation, and deceit remain relevant even in contemporary society. • Impactful

Setting: **The setting, particularly the evocative Victorian London, enhances the story's atmosphere and depth.** • Well-Developed Mystery:

The story expertly constructs a suspenseful mystery that keeps the reader engaged throughout.

Limitations and Related Topics: • Pacing and

Foreshadowing: *While generally effective, some readers might find certain plot elements less compelling or feel that the pacing is occasionally*

uneven. • Character Development: **While individual characters are well-defined, the antagonists' motivations could be more deeply explored.** •

Socio-Political Commentary: **The socio-political commentary, while present, is arguably less profound than in some other of Doyle's works.** •

The "Holmesian" Approach: **The story demonstrates the famous "Holmesian" formula but can be criticized for relying on stereotypical portrayals of specific character traits and possibly limiting the scope of potential for the future stories to come.** Data Visualisation

(Example): • Timeline of Clues Discovered: *A visual representation (e.g., a timeline chart) detailing the discovery of key clues and how they connect to the broader mystery.* Case Studies: • Adaptations of the story:

Examining how various film and television adaptations have interpreted and reinterpreted the story, highlighting their successes and limitations. •

Literary Criticism: *Discussing how literary critics have analyzed "The Sign of Four" with respect to the evolution of detective fiction or the changing societal perceptions of crime during that time.* Actionable

Insights: • Plot **The story demonstrates how a well-structured narrative can effectively build suspense and resolve the mystery.** • Character

Development: **Studying character development in "The Sign of Four" can be useful for aspiring writers in developing compelling characters who drive the narrative forward.** • Setting and

Atmosphere: The novel utilizes effective descriptive language and setting to immerse the reader and enhance the story's atmosphere. Advanced FAQs: **1.**

How does "The Sign of Four" compare to Doyle's later Holmes stories in terms of the balance between deduction and emotion? **2.** What impact has "The Sign of Four" had on the development of the detective genre, particularly its use of clues and red herrings? **3.**

To what extent does the story reflect the social and political anxieties of late Victorian England? **4.** How does the presentation of Holmes and Watson in "The Sign of Four" differ from their portrayals in other stories? **5.** What lasting contribution does "The Sign of Four" make to the representation of Victorian London in literature?

Conclusion:** "The Sign of Four" stands as a testament to the enduring power of well-crafted storytelling. Its compelling mystery, memorable characters, and insightful reflection of Victorian society continue to resonate with readers today. By analyzing the story's narrative structure, character development, and social context, we gain valuable insights into the evolution of detective fiction and the

lasting legacy of Arthur Conan Doyle's literary genius. The story's continued appeal lies in its ability to transport the reader to another time and place, engaging them in a captivating journey of discovery.

The Sign of Four: A Deep Dive into Arthur Conan Doyle's Thrilling Sherlock Holmes Adventure

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories are legendary, and among them, *The Sign of Four* stands out as a particularly compelling and action-packed installment. Published in 1890, this novella takes us on a whirlwind journey from the foggy streets of London to the exotic jungles of India, all in pursuit of a cryptic clue and a substantial treasure. More than just a detective mystery, *The Sign of Four* offers a fascinating glimpse into Victorian society, explores themes of justice and revenge, and further solidifies the enduring appeal of its iconic protagonists, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. For fans of detective fiction and the Sherlock Holmes canon, *The Sign of Four* is an essential read. It's a story that deviates slightly from the more cerebral deductions of

some other tales, injecting a healthy dose of romance, peril, and daring escapes, making it a truly memorable entry in the chronicles of 221B Baker Street.

Unpacking the Plot: A Mysterious Client and a Hidden Treasure

The narrative of **The Sign of Four** begins with a distraught young woman named Mary Morstan arriving at Sherlock Holmes's doorstep. She comes seeking his help regarding a series of anonymous letters she has been receiving for six years. These letters, she explains, have been guiding her to meet at a specific location on the same day each year to receive a valuable pearl. This year, however, the cryptic instructions have changed, leading her to seek the assistance of the world's only consulting detective. Holmes, ever intrigued by unusual cases, quickly takes on Miss Morstan's problem. He deduces remarkably accurate details about her life and character from her attire and demeanor, showcasing his unparalleled observational skills. The mystery deepens when the rendezvous leads not to a pearl, but to a peculiar, weathered old man named Thaddeus Sholto. Sholto reveals that the pearls were sent by his late father, Major John Sholto, who had a secret connection to Miss Morstan's own father, Captain Arthur Morstan.

The story then takes a dramatic turn as it's revealed that Major Sholto had entrusted a magnificent treasure to his sons, Thaddeus and Bartholomew, with the intention of dividing it equally with Captain Morstan. However, Captain Morstan had disappeared under mysterious circumstances many years prior, leaving the treasure undiscovered. Now, with the arrival of Miss Morstan and the subsequent murder of Bartholomew Sholto shortly after their meeting, the hunt for the treasure becomes a race against time and a dangerous game of cat and mouse.

The Iconic Duo: Holmes and Watson in Action

No exploration of **The Sign of Four** would be complete without celebrating the enduring partnership of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. In this novella, their dynamic is as strong and engaging as ever. Watson, our ever-loyal narrator, provides the human element and the reader's perspective, often marveling at Holmes's brilliance while also displaying his own courage and resourcefulness. Holmes, of course, is in his element. He's the intellectual powerhouse, piecing together clues with astonishing speed and accuracy. His methods, often unconventional and bordering on eccentric, are on full

display. From his chemical experiments in their Baker Street rooms to his remarkable ability to track suspects through the labyrinthine streets of London, Holmes captivates us with his sheer genius. This particular story also offers a more personal glimpse into Holmes and Watson's lives. We see Watson's burgeoning affection for Mary Morstan, adding a romantic subplot that elevates the stakes beyond a mere criminal investigation. This development allows us to see a softer side to the often-aloof detective and highlights the deep bond of friendship between the two men.

Key Characters and Their Roles

Beyond the central duo, **The Sign of Four** introduces a cast of memorable characters who contribute significantly to the plot: ** **Mary Morstan:*** The "client" of the story, Mary is an intelligent and independent woman whose quest for justice and her inheritance sets the entire adventure in motion. Her quiet dignity and unwavering resolve make her a compelling figure. ** **Thaddeus Sholto:*** The eccentric and somewhat flamboyant son of Major Sholto, Thaddeus plays a crucial role in revealing the truth about the treasure and his father's past. His nervous disposition and love for exotic pets add a

touch of the bizarre to the narrative. * **Bartholomew Sholto:** Thaddeus's twin brother, Bartholomew is the more pragmatic and somewhat greedy of the two. His murder becomes a central mystery, driving the investigation forward. * **Inspector Lestrade:** The perpetually outmatched but well-meaning detective from Scotland Yard, Lestrade represents the official arm of the law. He often relies on Holmes's superior intellect to solve the most baffling cases. * **Jonathan Small:** The primary antagonist of the story, Jonathan Small is a one-legged ex-convict with a significant grievance. His pursuit of the treasure is fueled by a desire for revenge and a claim of rightful ownership. His character embodies the darker undercurrents of the British Empire. * **Tonga:** Small's loyal and formidable Andaman Islander companion. Tonga is a master of stealth and a deadly adversary, adding a significant element of exotic danger to the climax.

Themes Explored in The Sign of Four

Arthur Conan Doyle masterfully weaves several important themes into the fabric of *The Sign of Four*:

- * **Justice and Revenge:** The story is driven by the pursuit of justice for past wrongs. Jonathan Small seeks retribution for his mistreatment and wrongful imprisonment, while Mary Morstan seeks what is

rightfully hers. The novella explores the complex motivations behind both justice and revenge. * **The British Empire and Colonialism:** *The Sign of Four* offers a critical look at the darker side of British colonialism. The treasure itself is loot from India, and Jonathan Small's narrative highlights the exploitation and injustices faced by individuals within the empire. The exotic elements of the story, from the pearls to Tonga, further underscore this theme. * **Love and Romance:** The burgeoning relationship between Watson and Mary Morstan adds a significant romantic element to the story. This subplot humanizes Watson and provides a hopeful counterpoint to the darkness of the crime. * **The Power of Observation and Deduction:** As with all Sherlock Holmes stories, the central theme is the power of keen observation and logical deduction. Holmes's ability to extract vital information from seemingly insignificant details is at the heart of his success.

Literary Significance and Enduring Appeal

The Sign of Four holds a significant place in the Sherlock Holmes canon for several reasons. It's the first story where Holmes and Watson embark on an adventure that takes them outside of London,

showcasing Conan Doyle's ability to create a sense of grand adventure. The novella also introduces a more complex antagonist in Jonathan Small, whose motivations are rooted in a historical injustice. The story's blend of intricate plotting, thrilling action sequences, and character development has cemented its status as a fan favorite. The chase sequence down the Thames and the dramatic confrontation with Small and Tonga in the deserted house are particularly memorable and exciting. The enduring appeal of **The Sign of Four**, like all Sherlock Holmes tales, lies in the brilliance of its central character. Holmes remains a timeless figure, embodying intellect, logic, and an unshakeable pursuit of truth. Dr. Watson, as the relatable observer and chronicler, ensures that the stories remain grounded and accessible. Together, they form one of literature's most iconic and beloved duos.

Key Takeaways and Why You Should Read It

If you're a fan of Sherlock Holmes, mystery novels, or simply enjoy a well-crafted adventure, **The Sign of Four** is a must-read. It offers: * **A captivating mystery:** The puzzle of the anonymous letters, the missing treasure, and the murder of Bartholomew

Sholto will keep you guessing until the very end. *
Thrilling action: From boat chases to daring escapes, the story is packed with exciting sequences.
* **Rich historical context:** The novel provides insights into Victorian London and the impact of the British Empire. * **Memorable characters:** Holmes and Watson are at their finest, and the supporting cast is equally engaging. * **A touch of romance:** The developing relationship between Watson and Mary Morstan adds an emotional layer to the narrative. In conclusion, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* is far more than just another detective story. It's a masterclass in suspense, a vivid portrayal of a bygone era, and a testament to the enduring power of keen intellect and unwavering friendship. Whether you're a seasoned Holmesian or new to the world of Baker Street, this gripping novella promises an unforgettable reading experience.

The Enduring Legacy of "The Sign of Four" in Arthur Conan Doyle's Literary Universe

At the heart of Arthur Conan Doyle's vast literary catalog lies a masterful fusion of mystery, deduction,

and psychological depth—embodied most vividly in *The Sign of Four*, the sixth novel featuring his iconic detective Sherlock Holmes. Published in 1893, this work stands as a cornerstone of early detective fiction, not only expanding Holmes’s narrative world but also deepening the thematic complexity that defines Doyle’s genius. More than a mere puzzle to solve, *The Sign of Four* explores the interplay of obsession, guilt, and moral ambiguity, offering readers a layered experience that continues to captivate literary enthusiasts and scholars alike.

Unraveling the Plot: A Study in Complexity and Suspense

Set against the backdrop of colonial India and the fog-laden streets of London, *The Sign of Four* centers on Holmes and Dr. Watson’s pursuit of a stolen treasure linked to a series of violent murders. The narrative unfolds through Doyle’s signature blend of meticulous clue placement and atmospheric tension, with the titular “sign”—a cryptic symbol discovered at crime scenes—serving as both a literal clue and a metaphor for hidden truths buried beneath layers of deception. The novel’s strength lies in its intricate plotting: Doyle weaves multiple threads of criminal intrigue, personal vendettas, and psychological manipulation into a rich

tapestry that challenges readers to separate appearance from reality. Doyle's use of setting is particularly evocative; the contrast between the opulent, exotic East and the gritty, industrialized West mirrors the moral contrasts at play within the story. Each character, from the brooding Professor Moriarty to the conflicted Dr. Watson, becomes a vessel for exploring themes of ambition, redemption, and the cost of obsession. The novel's tension builds slowly, not through sudden shocks but through the gradual revelation of motives and hidden connections—a testament to Doyle's mastery of narrative pacing.

Key Insights: The Psychology of Crime and the Power of Deduction

Beyond its compelling plot, *The Sign of Four* offers profound insights into human psychology. Doyle delves into the inner lives of his characters with a depth rare for his time, portraying crime not merely as an external act but as a manifestation of profound psychological conflict. The protagonist, Dr. Watson, serves not only as Holmes's loyal companion but as a reflective voice, grounding the reader in the emotional and ethical dimensions of the mystery. Meanwhile, Moriarty emerges as a chilling archetype of the anti-detective—a figure whose intellect matches Holmes's,

yet whose moral compass lies irreparably broken. This psychological realism elevates the novel beyond conventional whodunits into a meditation on the nature of evil and the fragility of virtue. Doyle's ability to balance intricate mystery with deep character study reveals his dual identity as both a storyteller and a social commentator, using crime fiction as a lens to examine the darker recesses of the human psyche.

Applications and Enduring Relevance in Modern Crime Fiction

The influence of *The Sign of Four* extends far beyond its initial publication, shaping the evolution of detective fiction for generations. Its fusion of intellectual puzzle and psychological depth laid groundwork for later writers who blend logic with emotional resonance, from Agatha Christie to modern crime novelists exploring moral ambiguity. The novel's emphasis on symbolic clues—like the recurring “sign”—has inspired countless works where mystery is layered with metaphor, inviting readers to engage not just intellectually but interpretively. Moreover, the novel's exploration of colonial tensions and moral compromise resonates in contemporary discussions about power, justice, and identity. As new adaptations and interpretations emerge—whether through film,

theater, or academic analysis—The Sign of Four remains a vital text, offering timeless insights into how stories of crime and deduction can illuminate deeper truths about society and the self.

Future Outlook: A Timeless Cornerstone of Mystery Literature

Looking ahead, The Sign of Four continues to secure its place as a foundational work in the detective genre. Its sophisticated narrative structure and psychological nuance ensure that it remains relevant not only to fans of classic fiction but also to scholars analyzing the roots of modern mystery storytelling. As digital media and interactive platforms expand the ways stories are told, Doyle's pioneering blend of suspense, character depth, and thematic richness offers a blueprint for engaging audiences across mediums. The novel's enduring appeal lies in its ability to challenge readers to think critically, question appearances, and recognize the complexity beneath every mystery. In a world increasingly saturated with fast-paced narratives, The Sign of Four endures as a reminder of the power of slow, deliberate storytelling—one that rewards patience with revelation, and insight with understanding. Its legacy is not merely historical; it is alive, continuing to inspire

new generations of writers, readers, and thinkers drawn to the enigmatic allure of Doyle's world.

The Sign of Four: A Deep Dive into Arthur Conan Doyle's Enduring Masterpiece

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is a literary titan, a detective whose deductive prowess and eccentricities have captivated readers for over a century. While "The Hound of the Baskervilles" often steals the spotlight, Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Sign of Four," first published in 1890, holds a crucial place in the Holmes canon. This thrilling novella offers a complex plot, introduces significant recurring characters, and delves into themes that continue to resonate with audiences today. More than just a classic detective story, "The Sign of Four" is a testament to Doyle's evolving craft and a fascinating window into Victorian society.

Unpacking the Title: The Intriguing "Sign of Four"

The very title, "The Sign of Four," is a masterstroke of

intrigue. It immediately sparks curiosity, hinting at a secret society, a pact, or a hidden brotherhood. This enigmatic moniker is central to the mystery's core. The story revolves around a hidden treasure, stolen goods, and a series of cryptic clues that point towards a group of four individuals bound by a shared past and a common objective. Doyle masterfully weaves this titular mystery throughout the narrative, ensuring the reader is as invested in deciphering the "sign" as they are in solving the crime itself. This clever titling contributes to the story's enduring appeal and SEO discoverability, as searches for "Sherlock Holmes sign of four" are consistently high.

The Plot: A Labyrinth of Secrets and Betrayal

At its heart, "The Sign of Four" is a tale of revenge, greed, and a quest for justice, all delivered with Doyle's signature blend of meticulous detail and thrilling pace. The story begins with the arrival of Mary Morstan, a beautiful and distressed young woman, at 221B Baker Street. She seeks Sherlock Holmes's help in uncovering the truth behind the disappearance of her father, Captain Arthur Morstan, years prior. Her only inheritance from him is a mysterious annual delivery of a valuable pearl. However, the latest pearl

delivery comes with a peculiar note, inviting her to meet a mysterious benefactor and hinting at a great injustice and a lost treasure.

Holmes, with his ever-present companion Dr. John Watson, eagerly takes on the case. Their investigation leads them through the grimy docks of London, across the treacherous Thames, and ultimately to a remote island. The narrative expertly navigates a complex web of deceit, involving a vengeful former soldier, a tyrannical official, and a hidden trove of stolen Indian treasure. The climax is a thrilling chase and confrontation, where Holmes's intellect and Watson's courage are put to the ultimate test. The plot's intricate structure, with its red herrings and surprising twists, makes "The Sign of Four" a prime example of a classic detective mystery that keeps readers guessing until the very end. This labyrinthine quality also contributes to the novella's search engine ranking, as users often search for plot summaries and analyses of "the sign of four plot details."

Key Characters and Their Roles

Beyond the iconic Holmes and Watson, "The Sign of Four" introduces characters who leave a lasting impact on the Sherlock Holmes universe. Mary Morstan herself is a compelling figure, a victim

seeking truth and agency in a patriarchal society. Her intelligence and composure make her a worthy client, and her burgeoning relationship with Watson adds a touch of romance and personal depth to the otherwise detached detective narrative. Major John Sholto, the son of a former associate of Captain Morstan, becomes a central figure in the unfolding mystery. His eccentricities and potential guilt add layers of suspicion. Bartholomew Sholto, his half-brother, is a more sinister character, embodying avarice and cruelty. Then there's Jonathan Small, the one-legged convict and the titular fourth member of the 'sign', whose motivations for revenge and reclamation of the treasure drive much of the plot. These well-drawn characters, each with their own secrets and motivations, are essential to the novella's success and why readers continue to search for information on "sign of four characters."

Thematic Depths: Beyond the Deduction

While Holmes's unparalleled deductive reasoning is the primary draw, "The Sign of Four" explores several significant themes that elevate it beyond a simple whodunit. The story is steeped in the colonial legacy of the British Empire, with the stolen treasure

originating from India. This highlights the exploitation and power dynamics inherent in colonialism, a topic that resonates even today. The novella also touches upon themes of justice and retribution. Jonathan Small, despite his criminal status, acts out of a perceived sense of injustice, seeking to reclaim what he believes is rightfully his. This ambiguity between justice and law, right and wrong, adds a moral complexity to the narrative. Furthermore, the novella subtly explores themes of love and companionship through the developing bond between Watson and Mary Morstan, offering a glimpse into the personal lives of these beloved characters. The exploration of these deeper themes is what makes "The Sign of Four" a popular search query.

Doyle's Evolving Craft and Victorian London

"The Sign of Four" represents a maturation in Arthur Conan Doyle's writing. Compared to his earlier Holmes stories, this novella is more ambitious in its plot complexity and character development. Doyle demonstrates a keen eye for detail in his depiction of Victorian London, from the fog-shrouded streets and bustling markets to the opulent homes of the wealthy and the seedy underbelly of the city. The vivid

descriptions immerse the reader in the era, making the historical context an integral part of the story. His ability to blend intricate plotting with atmospheric setting is a hallmark of his style and a key reason why "the sign of four setting" is often researched.

The Influence and Legacy of "The Sign of Four"

The impact of "The Sign of Four" on the detective fiction genre cannot be overstated. It cemented the popularity of Sherlock Holmes and introduced elements that became staples of the genre. The novella's success paved the way for more complex and character-driven mysteries. The intricate plotting, the introduction of compelling supporting characters, and the thematic richness continue to influence writers and captivate readers. Even today, fans delve into discussions and analyses of "the sign of four analysis" and "the sign of four review" to appreciate its enduring quality. The story's adaptability has also led to numerous film and television adaptations, further solidifying its place in popular culture. Whether you are a seasoned Holmes aficionado or a newcomer to the world of Baker Street, "The Sign of Four" remains an essential and thoroughly enjoyable read, a testament to the enduring genius of Arthur Conan

Doyle.

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Questions & Answers About the sign of four arthur conan doyle

N o	Question	Answer
1	What makes 'The Sign of Four' a particularly exciting Sherlock Holmes adventure?	'The Sign of Four' is renowned for its fast-paced plot, exotic settings (including India and the foggy streets of London), a compelling mystery involving a stolen treasure, and a dramatic chase sequence, all classic elements that thrill readers.
2	Who are the main characters introduced or significantly developed in 'The Sign of Four'?	This novel is crucial for introducing Dr. Watson's future wife, Mary Morstan, who is central to the mystery. It also features the intriguing Bartholomew Sholto, the villainous Jonathan Small, and the memorable Tonga, a fierce Andaman Islander.
3	What is the 'sign' in 'The Sign of Four', and why is it so important?	The 'sign' refers to the four Andaman Islanders (one of whom is Tonga) who are bound by oath to serve and protect Jonathan Small and his stolen treasure. Their existence and actions are key to unraveling the conspiracy and locating the missing jewels.

4	How does 'The Sign of Four' explore themes beyond just a simple detective story?	The novel delves into themes of colonialism, revenge, greed, and the lingering impact of the past. The motivations of the characters are often rooted in injustices experienced in colonial India, adding a layer of historical and social commentary.
5	Is 'The Sign of Four' considered a major or minor Sherlock Holmes novel?	It's generally considered a significant Sherlock Holmes novel. While perhaps not as universally iconic as 'The Hound of the Baskervilles,' its intricate plot, character development (especially for Mary), and unique exotic elements make it a highly regarded and popular entry in the canon.
6	What is the backstory behind the treasure in 'The Sign of Four'?	The treasure originates from Agra, India, and was stolen by Jonathan Small and his accomplices during the Indian Mutiny. It was originally part of a valuable hoard belonging to a Maharaja. The story of its acquisition and subsequent pursuit forms the core of the mystery.

7	How does Arthur Conan Doyle's writing style shine in 'The Sign of Four'?	Conan Doyle's characteristic blend of keen observation, logical deduction, and vivid descriptive prose is on full display. He masterfully builds suspense, creates memorable characters, and navigates complex plot twists, making the story both intellectually stimulating and highly entertaining.
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The Sign Of Four

Arthur Conan Doyle

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