

LOST TREASURE OF MARS BY EDMOND HAMILTON

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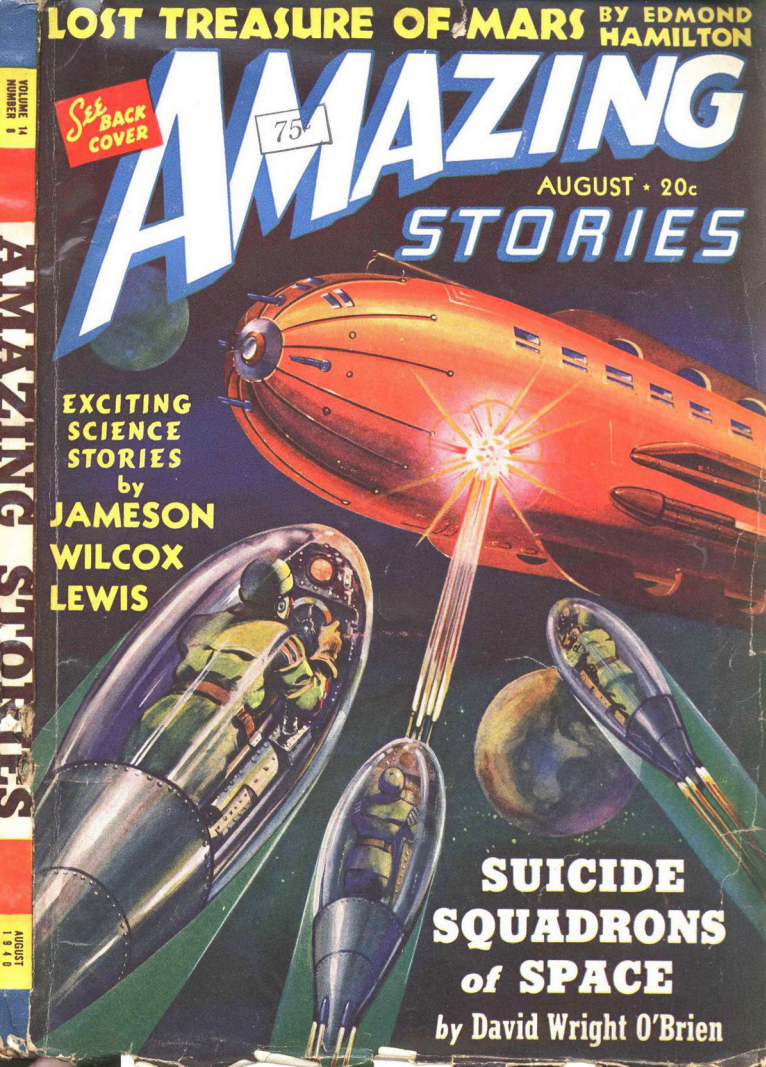
**SUICIDE
SQUADRONS
of SPACE**

by David Wright O'Brien

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LOST TREASURE

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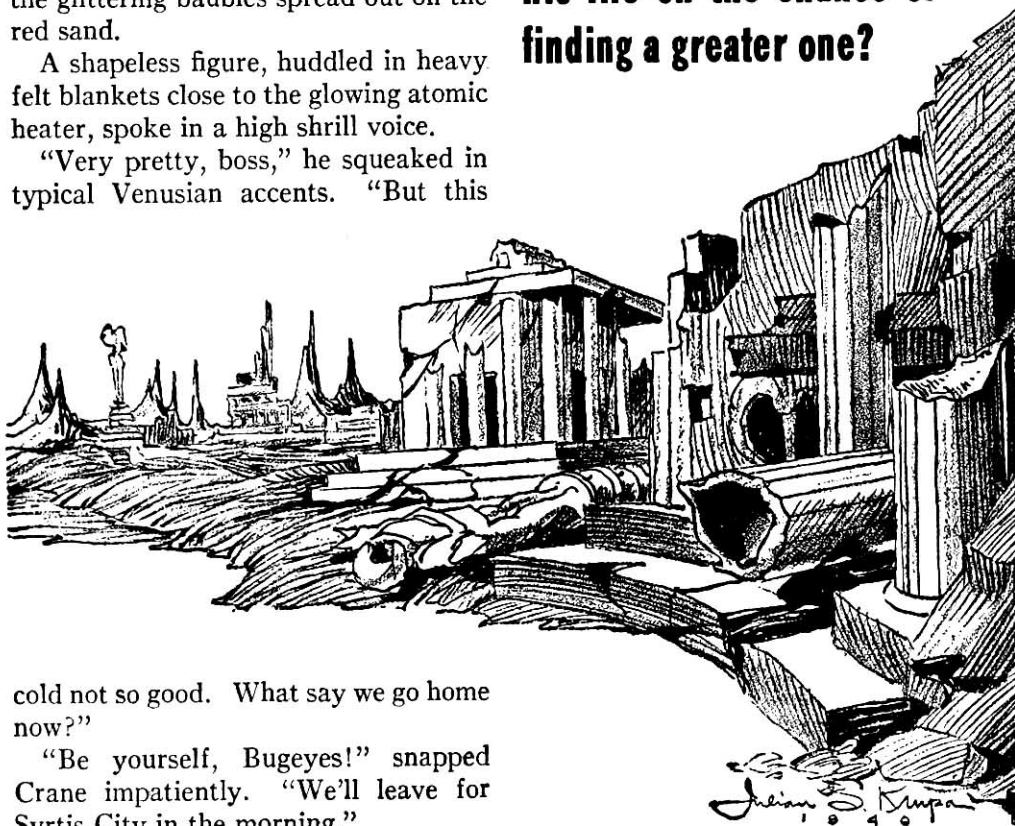
“WHAT they’ll say on Earth when we bring all *this* back!” Gareth Crane exulted. “The greatest Martian archeological find on record—a treasure worth millions!”

In his excitement, he did not feel the bone-penetrating chill of the bitter Martian night crowding sullenly down on the little camp in the ruins. His lanky, felt-clad figure was bent tautly, his lean, serious, spectacled young face feverish with excitement as he surveyed the glittering baubles spread out on the red sand.

A shapeless figure, huddled in heavy felt blankets close to the glowing atomic heater, spoke in a high shrill voice.

“Very pretty, boss,” he squeaked in typical Venusian accents. “But this

Gareth Crane faced death because of one treasure cache. Was it a good idea to gamble his life on the chance of finding a greater one?



cold not so good. What say we go home now?”

“Be yourself, Bugeyes!” snapped Crane impatiently. “We’ll leave for Syrtis City in the morning.”

“One more night in this desert, and poor Bugeyes freeze hard like board,”



"Door here!" said Bugeyes excitedly. "Maybe treasure here?" Crane could have kicked the Venusian

groaned the muffled figure. "Was big damned fool to leave Venus. Was much bigger damned fool to come to this world, which has remarkable absence of water, warmth and comfort."

And the shivering Venusian crouched so close to the glowing heater that the felt blankets began to scorch and had to be thrown hastily aside.

Bugeyes, as Crane had christened the amphibious swampman he had picked up as a servant on Venus, was scaled and gray and manlike, with a round head and the bulging, faceted eyes that had led to his nickname. He shivered violently, and rewrapped his blankets.

"Unlucky day when Bugeyes listen to Earthman's blandishings and sign up for servant," he moaned. "Now he doomed to die horrible death here in desert of cold. Master care nothing."

Crane paid no attention. The lanky young archeologist was feasting his gaze on the glistening objects spread on the sand in the glow of the heater.

THEY were brilliant gems, in antique Martian settings. There were sun-stones from the polar hills of Mars, blue gems whose interior content of disintegrating radioactive elements gave them their unearthly scintillation; Martian emeralds like blazing green eyes; moon-jewels from Saturn's satellites, throbbing living lights; great purple pearls from under the sea of Neptune; polaroid rock-crystals from the wild asteroids; and wicked, smoky fire-stones from Jupiter.

The stones, some faceted and others cut in curious concave cabochon* fashion, were set in beautifully worked mountings of platinum, silver and electrum. The mountings alone were very

valuable. But the stones, in antiquarian value alone, were many times more so.

For this was the legended jewel hoard of Kau-ta-lah, last of the great Martian kings of Rylik—those rulers of long ago whose mighty civilization had risen and waned at a time when Earth was still steaming jungle. The vague black ruins here in the desert had once been the magnificent capital of Rylik. Here for millenniums the hoard of the great kings had lain hidden, and here Gareth Crane had found it.

Yet though Crane was an ardent planetary archeologist, his thoughts were occupied not so much with the scholarly importance of his find as with its monetary value.

"These jewels are worth at least ten millions!" he exulted. "What that money will mean to the Institute!"

"Fail to see why boss get excited, when Institute of Planetary Science get the money," complained Bugeyes.

"You dope, the Institute needs that money for its campaign against inter-planetary plagues," Crane retorted. "To keep people like you and me from dying of Martian fever or Jovian croup."

Crane's serious eyes kindled as he pictured the enthusiasm of the Institute officials when he brought them back this treasure—a treasure that would give them funds for their desperately needed campaign to stamp out the interplanetary microbial diseases which had presented a grave problem ever since space travel had begun.

It was that need of the Institute which had spurred Crane in his secret search for the lost treasure of the ancient Martian king, Kau-ta-lah. Following archeological clues from ruin to lonely ruin across the desert, he had at last located the legended hoard so many had sought.

* This is a carbuncle-shaped precious stone, but not faceted. The term occurs in the French phrase *en cabochon*.—Ed.

"Hear rocket-car approaching damn fast!" said Bugeyes suddenly, standing up. "From west, I think."

Crane jumped up. He too soon heard the dim, drumming drone of rocket tubes from the starlit deserts westward.

"Who the devil would be coming to these lonesome ruins?" he exclaimed, his lean brown face stiffening.

He felt vague alarm. The waterless Martian desert, outside the few interplanetary colonial cities, was a No Man's Land extending beyond planetary law. Criminals often fled into it, though most of them soon died horribly of thirst or were forced to return.

"Bugeyes, get our stuff into the rocket car—we're not waiting till morning to leave!" Crane declared. "Hurry!"

As the Venusian hurried to obey, striking their felt tent and lugging it into the tubular rocket car nearby, Crane snatched up his jewels and stuffed them into his inside pockets.

The drone of approaching rockets was louder. At this moment, Deimos burst above the western horizon with theatrically spectacular effect. The brilliant rays of the nearer moon illuminated the whole scene.*

The climbing moon showed the somber, towering black time-eaten stones around them, the vague desert stretching to the horizons. And it showed also a tubular rocket car plunging toward them across the silvered sands, its stern rocket tubes spouting steady flame.

The writhing vehicle stopped nearby

* Deimos, the nearer moon of Mars' peculiar and diminutive pair of satellites, would appear to move very swiftly across the heavens, but not as a great globe such as our own Luna presents. It would be almost star-like, although of great brilliance, due to the thin Martian atmosphere, and its great clarity, which would allow the rays to reach the surface unimpeded. It is certain that the spectacle is a beautiful one and the light shed by it quite perceptible.—Ed.

and the roar of its tubes died. Three people in heavy felt suits emerged.

Crane eyed them as they came into the flaring glow of his atomic heater. The leader was a small figure who threw back the felt hood of the suit to reveal shining, bobbed blond hair.

"A girl!" Crane muttered. "What the devil—"

"Earth female here most unusual," squeaked Bugeyes, staring blankly. "Maybe boss forget a wife somewhere, and she follow?"

CRANE paid him no attention. The girl advanced to him, her feet dragging in the lead-soled gravity shoes.

Her small, firm-chinned white face had no friendliness in it, and her clear blue eyes were clouded with suspicion as she stared at the lanky young archeologist and his scaled gray servant.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"Gareth Crane's the name," answered the wondering young archeologist. "And this is my servant, Miss—"

"Jean Edwards," she finished curtly for him. "These are my guides—Jay Sweigert and Kaubos."

Crane's eyes swept the two men curiously. Sweigert was an Earthman, grossly fat, with pendulous jowls that gave him a pseudo-jovial expression belied by his fishy eyes.

Kaubos was a squat green Jovian with the enormously wide shoulders and hollow dark eyes and queer, fingerless hands of his race. He wore very thick-soled gravity-shoes on his toeless feet.

"Two nice-looking gentlemen, I not think," muttered Bugeyes hoarsely behind Crane. "Which one you think ugliest, boss?"

"Shut up," Crane ordered.

Jean Edwards broke in then.

"Are you a prospector?" she demanded directly.

"Nope — an archeologist, from the

staff of the Institute of Planetary Science," Crane answered.

The reaction to his statement was surprising. The girl's eyes flashed, and from the two men behind her came exclamations.

"An archeologist?" wheezed Sweigert. "That's interesting—that's mighty interesting."

Kaubos, the Jovian, had put his green hand on the butt of an atom-pistol at his belt. Crane felt a sudden tension.

Jean Edwards' blue eyes were stormy. "You followed my father's translation clues to these ruins of Rylik!" she accused Crane hotly. "You're here after the jewel hoard of Kau-ta-lah!"

Crane stiffened. The jewels! He felt the cold breath of danger. Yet he answered with assumed perplexity.

"The hoard of Kau-ta-lah? Do you mean to tell me you believe in that old treasure hunters' tale?"

"I know that hoard exists," Jean Edwards retorted. "My father proved it, by deciphering the Kos inscriptions."

"Your father?" Crane repeated, wrinkling his brow.

"He's Doctor Elver Edwards," the girl answered, and added defiantly, "the greatest planetary archeologist alive."

Crane uttered a whistle of surprise. "Edwards, the Earth University man who was imprisoned for embezzling university funds?"

Jean's blue eyes hardened. "Yes. And while he is in prison, you get hold of his Kos transcriptions, find the clue to Kau-ta-lah's hoard, and come here after it!"

"Maybe they've found it, too," wheezed Jay Sweigert. The fat Earthman's fishy eyes were watching Crane closely.

"Miss Edwards, I never even heard of your father's Kos work," Crane as-

sured the girl earnestly, and truthfully. He added, more equivocally:

"And I thought everyone had given up belief in Kau-ta-lah's treasure."

"Have you or have you not been hunting for that jewel hoard here in Rylik?" Jean demanded pointblank.

Crane hesitated. But only for an instant. He hated lying, but a lie was needed here if he was to get that fortune in jewels safely to the Planetary Institute that so direly needed it.

"I've no interest in crazy treasure tales," he answered calmly. "I've been here in Rylik studying to compose a list of the ancient kings' names, that's all. I'm through, and we were leaving."

JEAN EDWARDS' accusing gaze became less hostile.

"If that's so"—she hesitated—"I'm sorry for what I said."

"Come along, Bugeyes—time we were getting back to Syrtis City," Crane told the popeyed Venusian.

Sweigert's hand flashed an atom-pistol and aimed it at Crane's breast! The fat Earthman pointed with his other hand and yelled,

"He's lyin', Miss Edwards—he's found the jewels! Look at that sand!"

Crane glanced back, startled. Then he cursed inwardly at his own stupidity.

In the sand where he had been sitting examining the hoard, was an unmistakably clear impression of the jewels.

"See—he's had jewels on that sand, just a minute ago!" wheezed Sweigert. "Kaubos, keep them covered!"

The atom-gun of the squat green Jovian was already out, leveled at Crane and his servant.

"Most unhealthy fix, this," squeaked Bugeyes to his master. "Respectfully suggest we beat it damned fast."

"No chance now—don't start anything or they'll blast us," Crane said.

He was furious with himself. Why in the name of ten thousand devils had he been so asinine about leaving that clue? He could have wiped it out with his foot when the rocket ship first hove into sight.

Jean's blue eyes flamed. "And your lies nearly tricked me!" she flared at Crane. "You've found the hoard, through my father's work, and meant to steal it!"

Crane answered levelly, "I told you that I had never heard of your father's work, and that's the truth."

"Search them, Kaubos," ordered Sweigert.

The Jovian's flipperlike hands explored the Venusian servant's pockets first. Bugeyes emitted a shrill titter.

"Am slightly ticklesome," he apologized.

Kaubos passed on to Crane. In a minute he was drawing out the mass of jewels.

The brilliant gems spilled the light of flying Deimos in whirling scintillations as they caught the moon. Like muffled pyres of radiance, they burned in the Jovian's green hands.

Hoard of Kau-ta-lah! Legended jewels of the ancient Martian king that so many dreamers had sought and failed to find! Gathered long ago from far worlds by the space-venturing Martians of a forgotten civilization—and now about to change hands once more.

"They're worth millions!" choked Kaubos hoarsely, hollow eyes exultant. "Sweigert, we're rich—we're millionaires!"

Jean Edwards, startled by the Jovian's cry, raised her eyes from her fascinated inspection of the glittering hoard.

"You millionaires?" she exclaimed. "You forget that you men are only my guides. I agreed to pay you a tenth of what we found—no more. These

jewels belong rightfully to my father!"

Jay Sweigert laughed wheezily, as though appreciating a funny story.

"You didn't really believe we was fools enough to take just a tenth when we could have all, did you, Miss?" he chuckled.

Jean's blue eyes widened, stunned. And Crane laughed harshly.

"So—the crooks you hired are doublecrossing you?" he rasped to the girl. "It's just what you deserve."

"Humbly beg to submit that our own necks are in precarious situation," whispered Bugeyes hastily. "Fear unhandsome fat gentlemen about to take drastic measures."

In fact, Jay Sweigert was raising a trifle the atom-pistol in his fat hand. The obese Earthman grinned at Crane and his scared Venusian servant and the stunned, unbelieving girl.

"Guess we won't need you any longer, Miss," mocked Sweigert, "nor these two lads, either. Sorry to have to do this, but—"

"Existence of innocent Venusian boy about to be terminated, boss!" squeaked Bugeyes in panic.

"Wait, Sweigert!" Crane said quickly. "Before you gun us down—can't we *buy* our lives from you?"

SWEIGERT paused, his fishy eyes narrowing.

"Why, I'm a reasonable man, always willing to do business in a fair and reasonable way," he wheezed. "Only I don't see just what you can offer for your lives, that would interest a man who owns half of those little trinkets already."

And he nodded toward the heap of blazing jewels that the Jovian was stuffing into a small sack.

Crane's brown face was a hard mask behind which his thoughts were seething. That treasure had to go to the In-

stitute—and his only hope of saving it, and their lives as well, was to stall for time. He had a crazy plan in mind, one that would at least give him a little time.

"Sweigert, what if I could lead you to a treasure greater than that jewel hoard?" he asked. "Would you let us go then?"

"A treasure greater than Kau-talah's hoard?" the obese Earthman wheezed. "What kind of fairy tale is this, Crane?"

"There's a clue in these ruins to a far greater treasure in the ruined city of Ushtu, north of here," Crane explained confidentially. "It's in an inscription here that I came upon. I was on my way to Ushtu to find that greater treasure, when you came. If I translated the inscription and helped you find the Ushtu treasure, would you free us?"

Sweigert paused, considering. And Kaubos, the Jovian, burst in with thick-voiced dissuasion.

"He's lying, Jay—playing for time! He'll read some phony directions from that inscription, and we won't know whether his translation's true or not."

BUT Sweigert's greed-lit eyes had a cunning expression in them.

"There's a way we can check on Crane," he wheezed. "Miss Edwards here knows Martian hieroglyphics, remember. You said your father taught you how to translate it—didn't you, Miss Edwards?"

Jean, recovered a little from her amazement, flared at the fat criminal.

"I'll do nothing to help you!"

"I think you will," purred Sweigert. "Crane, you lead the way to that there inscription you spoke of. But—no tricks!"

Crane nodded, and started through the moonlit ruins, with Bugeyes and Jean beside him, and Sweigert and the

Jovian following with drawn atom-pistols.

About them towered the remnants of legended Rylik, black and shadowy in the streaming silver light. Shapeless masses of worn stones they were, half drifted over by the desert sands, wrecks of what had once been the mighty Martian capital of the equatorial kings.

Long and long ago, three hundred thousand years before ever the first Earthman had come to Mars, the planet had been dying. The arid stretches of the desiccated world were on the increase, the water-vines that were almost the only source of moisture were perishing. It was in that twilight of a dying world that Kau-talah had reigned here.

Crane's nerves, tensed by peril, felt the deathly spell of this dead city as he marched on in the moonlight. But at least, while they were alive, there was a faint shadow of hope.

They reached a broken wall beyond which loomed a grotesque statue, many times life-size, a stone figure gnawed by the ages.

"This is a statue of Kau-talah himself," Crane said earnestly. "See the inscription at its base."

The stone figure was indeed that of the Martian king of long ago, a huge-chested, bald, stilt-limbed figure in ceremonial trappings and diadem. Upon the sides of the pedestal were scenes of queer Martian space ships of that forgotten era, bringing gems and treasures from far planets, offering them to the king.

But on the front of Kau-talah's pedestal was a long inscription in the crescent-shaped characters of ancient Martian hieroglyphics.

Bugeyes whispered to Crane, "Boss, this I not like. If you are stalling for time, please do not. The suspense is killing me!"

"Don't worry," Crane whispered

back with a mirthless grin. "There's treasure here, all right. I'm not sticking out my neck just for the hell of it."

Then aloud: "I'll translate that for you," Crane said, but Sweigert stopped him.

"No, wait! Miss Edwards, you make a *written* translation of that first. Then I'll check Crane's translation against it."

"I won't do it!" Jean flamed, defiant.

"Do it, Jean," Crane said anxiously. "It's the only chance we've got to get out of this mess alive."

"He's right, Miss Edwards," purred the obese crook.

Reluctantly, Jean took out pad and pencil and began writing, gazing at the inscription as Kaubos played a fluorid spotlight on the worn characters.

Finally she handed the written translation of the inscription to Sweigert. The obese Earthman looked at Crane.

"Now start translating aloud," he wheezed. "If your version checks with Miss Edwards', I'll know you're reading it right. If it doesn't, one of you has tried to fool me."

Crane read the message of the hieroglyphics beneath the towering grotesque statue, in a slow voice.

Kau-ta-lah, Son of the Two Moons, King of Rylik, to all beholders:

I was a great king. I reigned in Rylik, where all my forefathers had reigned before me. I repelled the unhuman Wallus of the wastes. I sent ships to other worlds, as my fathers had done, and they brought back strange beasts and slaves and treasures such as are not known upon this world.

Yet all the treasures I have gathered together are of no worth beside the Greatest Treasure that is owned by the kings of the city Ushtu, and is hoarded by them beneath their palace. Many times did I attack their city and seek to wrest the Greatest Treasure from them, yet never could I do so.

And now the people of Rylik are dying as the water-vines fail us, and my space-captains have found no world on which we could live long, and the glory of Rylik is fading and falling. And in times to come, there will be nothing of great Rylik but an echoing name and a whisper of glory that has passed away forever and ever.

THE solemn words resounded with deep impressiveness — this bitter last message of a great Martian king, who saw his people and kingdom dying as the last frail water source perished.

Jay Sweigert had been reading from the written translation Jean had made, as Crane spoke. Now Sweigert looked up.

"Your reading checks with hers, Crane," he admitted. There was flaring greed in his fishy eyes. "So there is an even greater treasure than the jewels, buried under the ruins of Ushtu!"

"The Greatest Treasure?" repeated Kaubos incredulously. "What could be a greater treasure than these jewels, Jay?"

"Maybe that Greatest Treasure will be gems like no one ever heard of before," Sweigert muttered. "Maybe it's a scientific secret of some kind that enabled the armies of Ushtu to beat off the attacks of these people of Rylik. Whatever it is, that Greatest Treasure is something colossally valuable if it makes this jewel hoard insignificant, as Kau-ta-lah said."

"Yes, but they tell queer stories about those Ushtu ruins," Kaubos added uneasily. "People have vanished there—natives here are afraid to go near them—"

Sweigert's jowled fat face was scoffing. "Superstitions don't bother *me*! We're going to Ushtu—won't take but a few hours to get there in our rocket

car. Crane, can you locate the palace there?"

Crane nodded hesitantly. "I think so. The whole place is a ruin, of course, like this—but the palace site shouldn't be hard to find."

"Come along, then," Sweigert ordered. "The sooner Kaubos and I get that Greatest Treasure, the sooner you'll go free."

He chuckled, as he promised that. And Bugeyes whispered distrustfully to Crane,

"Fear fat Earthman plans to cross double again, once he gets Ushtu treasure. He laughs most unjoyful, very."

"While there's life, there's hope," Crane muttered doggedly. "And the Institute has *got* to get those jewels we found!"

They entered the rocket car. Kaubos shouldered forward to take the controls. Crane, Jean and the Venusian settled in swivel chairs behind the Jovian, at an order from Sweigert. The obese Earthman took the rear chair, his atom-pistol lazily balanced.

The rocket tubes at the back broke into a drumming drone. The car lurched forward, running smoothly over the sands on its low, flat, broad wheels, its jointed tubular body giving creakingly to accommodate itself to the inequalities of sand ridges and dunes.

Crane looked out. Phobos had risen in the starred heavens as Deimos hurtled toward the east. The two brilliant moons cast queer forked shadows beside the low car as it sped northward.

Rylik's wrecked stones receded from sight behind them. The vast, lonely moonlit Martian desert stretched away, brooding wastes tenanted only by sand and silence. Here and there were a few of the now rare water-vines, queer leafless plants that could draw moisture from far beneath the surface by capillary attraction. The vines had been

the only source of water for the native Martian peoples long ago, until the plants too had withered away.

Bugeyes shivered. "Unpleasant to die on dry world like this, without even spot of water to look at," he murmured.

"And when we're dead, Sweigert will have the jewels that would have bought my father's freedom," Jean whispered.

Crane stared at her. "That's why you wanted the jewels so badly? To get your father out of prison, by making restitution of the money he embezzled?"

"My father never embezzled that money, really," Jean answered dully. "He was on Saturn, on one of his archeological expeditions, and a dreadful famine was killing the Saturnian natives in that region. He took funds of his university to relieve the famine. Enemies charged him with theft, and he was sentenced to prison. I hoped that a small part of those jewels would make restitution, and free him."

CRANE impulsively squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry, Jean—I didn't know."

The rocket car sped northward for three hours. Deimos had set, by the time they sighted the ruined city of Ushtu.

Ushtu, once as great a metropolis as Rylik, was now a similar wreck of shattered stone and drifting sands. Lonely, desolate, it sat gloomily in the moonlight, brooding on past glories.

Kaubos stopped the car near the edge of the ruins. They got out, with Sweigert's atom-gun still covering the three.

"Now, Mr. Crane, find the palace here for us," Sweigert wheezed. "Under the palace is that Greatest Treasure, if the inscription back at Rylik was right."

Crane stared doubtfully through the

chill darkness at the bewildering tangle of broken stone wrecks.

"According to plans of Ushtu I've seen, the palace of the kings was near the western edge of the city," he said.

"Lead the way, then," ordered the obese criminal. "And *don't* try dodging out of sight. I can shoot, in case you're doubtful."

"This place nothing but dry sand and busted stones like other," squeaked Bugeyes distastefully as they entered the ruins. "Understatement, to call this one hell of a world."

"I don't like these ruins, Jay," Kaubos the Jovian was muttering behind them. "What with all the stories you hear about Ushtu, it gives me the creeps."

Sweigert's wheezy laugh chuckled. "When we lift the treasure here, you'll forget your creeps quick enough."

Crane's eyes searched the moonlit masses of broken stone. He identified the broad avenue that the maps of the dead city had called the "Way of Kings." At its end should be the palace—

And when they reached the palace, and the Greatest Treasure, what then? Time was running out fast, Crane knew. The brief respite his stratagem had gained for them was nearly ended.

Down the Way of Kings toward the west the strange little party went, with the bright disk of Phobos hanging low in the sky ahead to light their way. Stumbling over the broken paving, detouring around masses of stonework that had tumbled from the sides, they approached a massive broken-walled ruin at the avenue's end.

Palace of the kings of Ushtu, those long-dead Martian lords whose Greatest Treasure even great Kau-ta-lah had vainly coveted!

"There is something terrifying about this place," Jean Edwards said in a low

voice to Crane. "No wonder people shun it!"

They passed through an arched opening into what had been once a great court of the palace. Broken columns and statues of grotesque Martians of old lay scattered about on the flagging.

"Flash your light on those inscriptions," Crane told the Jovian. "There must be underground chambers beneath the palace, and we've got to find the entrance to them."

Kaubos directed his fluoric beam at the carven hieroglyphics Crane pointed out. Crane slowly translated aloud.

"Lords of Ushtu, owners of the Greatest Treasure, suzerains of the deserts north and south—behold our glory!"

"Behold our glory!" repeated Jean, her wide eyes sweeping the moonlit desolation of ruins about them, amid which the boasting words ironically echoed.

"It doesn't tell us anything," Crane muttered. "We must try to find a way into the underground chambers."

Crane had already noticed, at a corner of the ruined court, a small archway whose narrow stairs led down into darkness. But he had said nothing of it. He meant to draw out this search for the Greatest Treasure as long as possible, hoping for a break.

BUT Bugeyes upset his plan. The Venusian, who had been glancing around with his popping optics, suddenly pointed.

"Boss, there is stairs going down," he squeaked helpfully.

Crane could have kicked the simple-minded swampman where it would do the most good. But he pretended surprise.

"So there is. That may be the way down."

"Go ahead with the lamp, Kaubos," ordered Jay Sweigert. "I'll keep be-

hind these three to make sure they act right."

They started down the stairs, the Jovian's reddish beam flashing ahead. Up to meet them from the unguessable depths came a dank, musty odor that somehow was startling.

Crane knew the origin of that odor. He had never been here before, but he knew that smell. And his heart began to pound.

The stairs dropped downward further, and ended in a short stone passage that ran straight ahead. They moved along it, with Kaubos lighting the way. The passage ended in an open doorway.

Beyond that door lay a buried octagonal chamber two hundred feet across. The red beam flashed into it, and then the Jovian stopped, stupefied by what he saw.

"Why, look at *that!*" he husked amazedly.

The buried chamber contained a bubbling, fountaining pool of water—water that gushed up from depths far beneath, that filled all the chamber except a narrow stone ledge around it.

"That's the first time I ever saw that much water here on Mars!" exclaimed the astonished Jovian.

Bugeyes' protruding optics glistened. The amphibious Venusian squeaked,

"That water look like home, boss!"

Sweigert and Jean Edwards also were showing their surprise. Surface water was almost unknown on Mars; the water-vines that drew moisture from underground were the only source on this dying world.

But Sweigert's attention was not long to be distracted from his greed. His fishy eyes flashed cunningly.

"This must be where the treasure's hidden!" he exclaimed. "Those old Ushtu kings were clever—they sunk their treasure down here in the water,

where it couldn't even be seen. Go ahead, Kaubos—we'll have a look."

The Jovian led the way forward into the chamber. They stood on the narrow stone ledge that surrounded the bubbling pool.

To their left, there stood on the ledge a towering metal statue of an ancient Martian, stilt-limbed, huge-chested, with glaring jeweled eyes and a great mace uplifted in metal hands.

"See—that statue's some kind of symbolic guard over this place!" wheezed Sweigert excitedly. "And that means—"

AT that moment came an appalling interruption. There was a shifting of the stone under their feet, a creaking as of rusty metal levers in operation.

Crash! With thunderous reverberation, a solid block of stone dropped to close the door through which they had entered.

"It's a trap of some kind, operated automatically!" Kaubos yelled in panic. "We're prisoners in here—"

"Shut up!" ordered Sweigert. "Crane, try to get that door open."

Crane, as stunned as the others by the sudden springing of this ancient trap, went to the door. One glance showed him it was useless. That solid block of stone could not be raised.

"It can only be opened by a control from outside," the young archeologist said hoarsely. "We're trapped!"

"Listen—what's that?" cried Sweigert.

He and Kaubos flashed their lamp beams around. Then, for an instant, all stood frozen by sheer horror.

The metal guardian statue on the ledge was *moving*. It was striding toward them with slow, clanking steps, jeweled eyes glaring, great mace still raised above its head.

"It's *alive!*" the Jovian choked, staring wildly.

"No—it's just part of the trap—a mechanism of some kind automatically operated!" Crane yelled. "Get out of its way!"

But Kaubos seemed hypnotized by the oncoming, clanking figure. The metal statue loomed over him—

The mace flashed down, as though the thing had in it some control operated by its proximity to any living being. Straight down on the green head of the Jovian fell the mighty mace.

Jean screamed as Kaubos slumped to the floor, his brains crushed out. The statue rustily raised the mace, was coming on toward them—

"Run, you two!" Crane cried to Jean and Bugeyes. "Around the ledge away from it—don't let it catch up to us!"

But the ledge around the bubbling pool was only a few feet wide. There was no chance of evading the stalking metal figure on it.

Sweigert was firing his atom-pistol wildly at the striding statue. But the steady blast of atomic fire splashed harmlessly off the invulnerable metal. With a yell of terror, Sweigert flung away the exhausted pistol and stumbled forward with the others.

They retreated around the narrow ledge, while the metal guardian stalked relentlessly after them. The only light was the beam of the Jovian's fluoric lamp, which Crane had snatched up.

A complete circuit of the chamber they made—and still the metal horror followed them. It did not hurry; they could keep ahead of it by a fast walk. But it showed no signs of faltering or stopping, even after it had followed them around the pool for a score of times.

"Boss, how long before that thing get tired?" panted the Venusian. "Bugeyes not built for walking."

"We can't — get away from — it," gasped Jay Sweigert, his fat face livid with terror. "It'll get us in time—"

In fact, the metal automaton showed every sign of stalking around the narrow ledge until doomsday. Like a remorseless, mindless avenger, it came on with uplifted mace and sightless jeweled eyes.

Crane cursed himself for not foreseeing that the ancient Ushtu kings would have set some such guard here. This metal automaton was doubtless actuated and set into motion by the same cunning mechanism which had closed the door to trap anyone who entered the place. . . .

BUGEYES was faltering, Sweigert gasping pitifully as he staggered on. It seemed hours that they had fled thus around the bubbling, chuckling pool.

"We can't keep this up much longer!" Crane exclaimed, panting. "Our only chance is to get down into the pool, and hang onto its edge till that thing's mechanism runs down and stops."

"Now you talking, boss!" exclaimed Bugeyes. "Little swim freshen me up, very!"

Hastily, they slid down into the bubbling waters. Their feet touched no bottom—Crane had already guessed that the pool was almost bottomless, gushing up from far depths below.

But they managed to keep afloat by clinging to the stone edge of the ledge. Jean turned a white face toward him with a brave smile. Sweigert's fishy eyes were dilated, and he was breathing in great sobs as he clung to his hold.

But Bugeyes, with a cry of pleasure, had shed his felt suit and was diving in and out of the water with manifest happiness, his protruding eyes glistening as he broke surface.

"~~Hot~~ Jog!" the Venusian squeaked. "This more like it! If Bugeyes got to die, he wants to die in native water!"

Sweigert was staring elsewhere. "Look—look at that metal monster!" he gasped. "It won't stop—it won't never stop!"

With clanking, reverberating strides, the automaton was stalking on and on around the ledge with upraised mace.

Each time it passed just above them, its feet grinding on the stones, Jean flinched back. Crane put his arm around her shoulders, his other hand keeping the fluoric lamp up as he held on.

The bubbling water's icy cold penetrated their limbs. The monster showed no sign whatever of stopping. Crane tried desperately to evolve some scheme of wrecking the thing, but without avail. What could harm a monstrosity like that?

SWEIGERT had become silent. Crane turned, found that the fat criminal had slipped beneath the surface.

"Bugeyes, Sweigert has sunk!" Crane yelled.

"I go after him, boss!" the Venusian cried.

The scaled, gray amphibious servant dived hastily down into the waters. Long moments elapsed. Then Bugeyes reappeared, with a mass of brilliant jewels in his hands.

"I find fat man down there, boss," he chortled, "and get jewels out of his suit before he sink further!"

"You let him drown?" Crane accused, and the Venusian stared blankly.

"Sure, boss—but I get jewels. That what you wanted, isn't it?"

Crane's lips tightened. He had no reason to feel pity for Sweigert—but he had meant for Bugeyes to save the fat criminal, nevertheless. And Bugeyes had misunderstood completely.

"Too late to help it now," he muttered to Jean. He stowed the jewels into his own suit. "We've got the hoard of Kautalah back—not that it looks as if we'll ever get out with it."

"I—I can't hold on much longer," Jean whispered. "Let me sink, when the time comes. I don't want to drag *you* down."

"Hell, there must be some way out of this devil-trap!" Crane cried.

The chuckling bubble of the waters around him was sardonic in its answering laughter. The metal automaton still strode endlessly around and around the nightmare chamber.

But the bubbling chuckle of the waters insinuated an idea in Crane's brain. He maneuvered around toward the Venusian.

"Bugeyes, there may be a way out of here for *you*, at least!" he exclaimed. "The bubbles in this water—they're air, which means the underground spring that feeds this pool has a connection through some crevice or cleft with the upper air. If you could swim down and find such a connection, you could possibly win clear."

Bugeyes looked anxious. "No, boss—won't go and leave you here."

"You've got to—it's our only chance!" Crane insisted. "For if you can get out and come back to the outside of that door, it's just possible that you can set us free. I believe that the door opens when anyone starts down that stairs toward it—otherwise, it wouldn't have been open when we came down to this hellish trap."

Bugeyes looked doubtful still, but finally assented.

"I try it then, boss. Swim way down and look for opening. If find one, good! If not, my number damned well up."

The amphibious servant breathed deeply for several moments, then with a darting movement dived down into

the bubbling interior.

"It's an impossibility," Jean murmured. "Nobody could swim down to such depths as that and find a way out."

"Bugeyes may be able to," Crane muttered, hoping against hope. "Those Venusians can stay underwater a tremendously long time."

MINUTES passed, but nothing changed. Bugeyes didn't reappear. The automaton clanked relentlessly on around the chamber.

Crane listened tensely for a step outside the stone-sealed door of the chamber. But there was no such sound. His faint hopes waned. Despair darkened in his brain, as he was aware that Jean's frozen hands could no longer cling to the stone ledge.

He was holding her up by his own strength. But his energy was running out fast. Better to let go and sink together into the numbing depths, he thought, than prolong the useless struggle.

He chuckled harshly. "Drowned on Mars! At least, it's a crazily improbable way to end up. But I wish—"

A clash of stone and metal, a flood of faint light pouring down into the chamber! The block in the door was slowly *rising*!

"By heaven, Bugeyes got through!" Crane yelled. "Jean, look—"

The door was open. And the metal automaton had halted in its former position to the left of the opening. Not only halted, but it had resumed its age-old post!

The staggering, dripping, shivering figure of a scratched, weebegone Venusian appeared outside the door.

"Stay out there, Bugeyes—don't enter or you'll start the automaton moving again!" Crane yelled. "We're coming out!"

He clambered up with Jean, dragging

the girl onto the ledge. Two quick strides—and they were out of the chamber, on the stairway, safely escaped from the ancient treasure trap of Ushtu!

As Crane worked to revive the girl, Bugeyes chattered,

"Between ourselves, boss, that one hell of a swim! Bugeyes get down to the little underground river far below, carried away on it, swim back up it, find crevice and get up through that crevice to the ground, outside this cursed city. Bugeyes come back here—"

"And when you started down the stairs here, the door automatically opened, as I'd thought it would!" Crane cried. "And that metal monster went back to its place."

He chafed the girl's wrists. "Jean, we're safe!"

She clung to him, shuddering from the reaction.

"We've got the jewels, too," Crane exulted.

"You have them," she answered. "You found them."

Crane shook his head. "The Institute can spare enough of them to make restitution and free your father, Jean. We're partners in this. Partners—I like the sound of it, Jean!"

"If boss can spare time from romancing," broke in Bugeyes, "what about Greatest Treasure here in Ushtu? We get that too?"

"Yes," Jean remembered, "is the Greatest Treasure down in that pool somewhere, as Sweigert thought?"

Crane grinned haggardly. "Your father may have taught you how to read hieroglyphics, Jean, but you don't know much about Martian archeology. No more than Sweigert or Kaubos knew."

"What do you mean?" she asked puzzledly. "There *is* a Greatest Treasure, isn't there?"

(Concluded on page 131)

THE INCREDIBLE THEORY OF DR. PENWING

(Concluded from page 45)

was that he had awakened from some hideous nightmare.

Someone was holding his hand. It was Sonie.

"Be quiet," she warned him. "You are pretty badly cut up. You need rest."

Bart's hand tightened over her fingers.

"Then it wasn't a dream," he said. "It was real."

"Too darned real!" said Sonie.

"And your father?" he asked. "Is he all right?"

"Yes. He has taken a truck and has gone to bring back the ship from where the Gorkins carried it."

"Huh?"

"Father explained it to me," Sonie went on. "He made a compass out of a bit of magnetized metal from one of the helmets. Then, after getting directions, angles and distances on the outer crust, he loaded the ship with Gorkins and returned to our back yard."

"He got his shotgun out of the house, had the Gorkins carry the ship down the street several blocks in the dark to a spot that corresponded with the position of the castle on the outer crust. He and the Gorkins got into the ship again and, in a few hours, made their appearance in the castle."

"And just in time!" said Bart.

The door opened at that moment, and Penwing came in. He was still wearing his helmet, and his face was beaming and his eyes were sparkling.

"We have proved my theory!" he said. "Young man, we have been to the outer crust and back. Now the skeptics . . ."

"Nuts!" said Bart. "We didn't go to any outer crust! There *isn't* any

outer crust, except the one we are living on."

"But my theory—"

"—is all wrong," broke in Bart. "I got a look at the stars while we were there. They were the same stars I have seen since childhood—except that they were slightly out of place."

"Your ship is built in some strange dimension, I'll admit," Bart went on. "Probably the fourth dimension. What really happened was that the ship distorted time and space about itself in some way, carried us backward in time to some forgotten civilization in the remote past. That would account for the altered appearance of the stars."

"Young man, you can't prove that!" Penwing protested.

"You can't disprove it!" Bart snapped.

"I'll build another ship!" Penwing exclaimed. "I'll prove to the world . . ."

"If you prove it," said Bart, "you'll prove it alone. I've had enough!"

That was too much for Sonie. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Quiet, you two!" she said. "Hasn't there been enough fighting for one day?"

Bart and Penwing looked embarrassed.

"I think you've got something there," Bart said sheepishly.

LOST TREASURE OF MARS

(Concluded from page 8r)

Crane nodded. He pointed through the open door at the bubbling pool.

"There it is."

"You mean—the pool itself?" she exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "What was the rarest, the most valuable, the most sought after thing on dying, drying Mars? *Water!* Water that was so scarce that it was always referred to as the Great-

est Treasure. Water so valuable that the Ushtu kings guarded their fountain with that hellish mechanical trap.

"I knew as much," Crane grinned, "when I translated the inscription, of course—knew there'd be no treasure here but water. But I used that knowledge in an attempt to gain a respite, hoping for some break that would enable us to escape Sweigert and the Jovian.

"They didn't dream, of course, that what they were coming here for was

merely water. Sweigert, without knowing it, drowned in the very treasure he was seeking."

"Oh," said Jean. And that was all she could say.

But not Crane. "There's another treasure, however, that I found—" he began.

"What?" Jean's eyes snapped. "Not been holding out on me, have you?"

Crane took her in his arms. "Not any longer, you little goof. Not any longer!"

MYSTERY OF THE MIND MACHINE (Concluded from page 123)

"That's the very point," said Taylor, grinning.

The driver left to carry out his mission faithfully. But before the state police came to take the situation over, Maurine White and Bill Taylor had a quiet half hour to themselves, for their prisoners were secure, if bitter and sullen.

"You never told me that you were a secret service man!" Maurine White exclaimed.

"I'm not," Taylor laughed, "but I made myself believe I was. Long enough to project some misleading images, anyway. You never told me that you've been dancing with someone who looks exactly like me," he accused her.

"But I haven't! That is, I could see it all so plainly that I—"

"I understand," said Taylor, with a smile. "Would tomorrow night do just

as well?"

The girl gave one of her mysterious smiles.

"I was supposed to do some pictures, but now—maybe no one will ever want my pictures again."

"They'll want them more than ever when this story breaks," Bill Taylor declared wisely. "And don't you worry about your million-dollar yellow losing its value, in spite of what Steinbock said."

"Your million-dollar yellow," the girl corrected.

"Yours," said Taylor staunchly. "I remember the day you first ordered it. You specified your want for the wildest color ever made."

"Yes, I was angry about my art lesson that day. I was furious and the only way I could express myself was to smear yellow over everything. But *you* invented it for me. It's rightfully yours."

Bill Taylor folded the girl in his arms.

"Who," he said with a huge grin, "could say no?"

