

ARMAGEDDON, 1948 by ED EARL REPP

VOLUME 15
NUMBER 11

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AMAZING STORIES

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AMAZING STORIES



CONVOY TO ATLANTIS

By WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

NOVEMBER 1941

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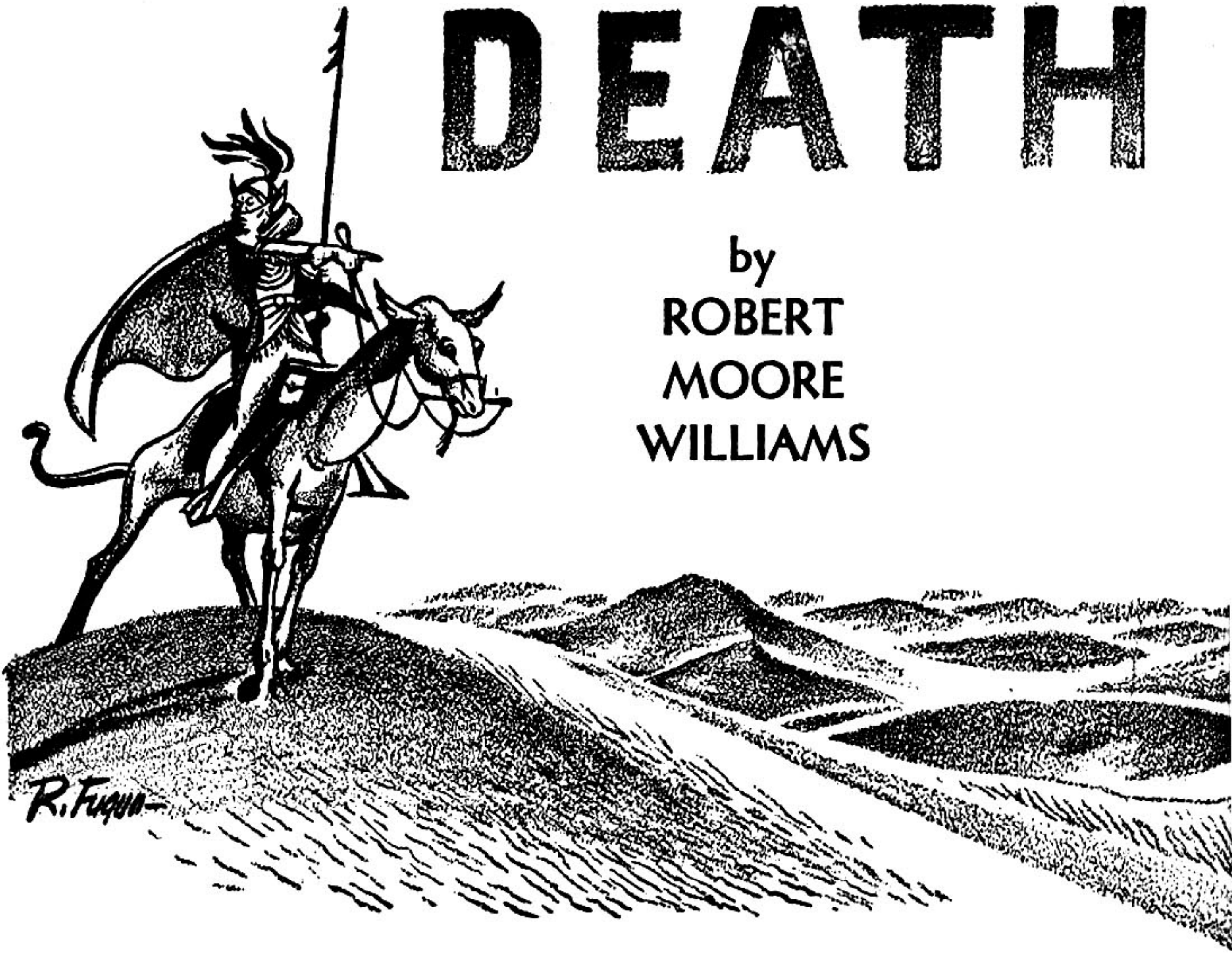
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Volume 15
Number 11

DEATH

by
ROBERT
MOORE
WILLIAMS



“YOU dirty devil! They’ll hang you for this!” Ann Roberts blazed.

“Shut up!” Red Kelly hissed.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” she snapped, turning an angry face toward him. “I was talking to—to that!” She waved her hand to indicate Knuckles Roker.

“Maybe you weren’t talking to me but I’m talking to you,” Red Kelly whispered fiercely. “And I’m telling you to shut up. If you call Roker names and make him mad, he’ll shoot us instead of marooning us as he intends to do.”

“I’d rather be shot than marooned here!” she answered.

The angry nod of her head took in the red sands, the rocky, forlorn hills of the deserts of Mars. Red Kelly knew she was right about that. A slug from

the heavy pistol in Roker’s hand meant a quick and comparatively painless death. But to be marooned here meant two days of torture and then a slow death. Two days was as long as any human, without adequate supplies of water, could withstand the blazing Martian sun. And when the sun was gone the deserts plunged from a temperature

Over the rise behind them loomed the dreaded figure of a mounted martian

DESERT

The savage code of the Martians was as ruthless as the desert they lived on; and more valuable than millions in gems



in excess of one hundred and twenty degrees straight down to freezing. The thin atmosphere held little heat.

"He's leaving us here without water and food," the girl continued. "What chance do we have?"

"Plenty," Kelly grimly whispered. He was a tall young man, red-headed, and very angry now, but holding his anger in check. "Roker's making a mistake. He thinks he's dumping us right in the middle of the worst stretch of desert on this damned planet, where we'll die of thirst within fort-eight hours. Well, he is dumping us in that kind of a spot. *But what he don't know is that he's leaving us within walking distance of the only spring in this whole cursed country.* So keep your mouth shut and don't make him mad. We'll lick the dirty devil yet."

He saw the quick light of hope dawn in the girl's eyes as she understood his meaning. He ignored her, turning his attention to the man standing beside the desert buggy, that queer, tank-like contraption, which, with huge wheels and insulated, air-conditioned body, made exploration of the red deserts possible.

"How about leaving us just a little water, Knuckles?" Red Kelly asked, making his voice as persuasive as possible.

Knuckles Roker was a big man, fat around the middle, with heavy, droopy shoulders, and a face that would not take a prize in a beauty contest among gorillas. He was standing with his back to the door of the desert buggy regarding them with a scowling frown that indicated he was thinking. The gun in his hand, a forty-five caliber pistol, was very steady.

Red Kelly had all the respect in the world for that gun. He had seen Roker throw an empty whiskey bottle in the air and smash it with a single shot be-

fore it hit the ground. He had seen the man knock over a *droon* monkey, one of the few animals of Mars that could live in these deserts, with a single shot when the monkey was running at full speed. Which meant that Kelly was taking no chances on trying to jump Roker as long as he had the gun.

Since Roker seemed not to hear his question, Kelly repeated it.

"Naw," said Roker. "No water for youse, not a drop. And shut up!" he scowled fiercely at Kelly. "I'm tryin' to think what is best to do with youse, now that I got these—" He patted the bulging money belt looped around his fat stomach.

It was, or minutes earlier it had been, Red Kelly's money belt. But there wasn't any money in it. There hadn't been much money in it for years, but a few minutes earlier it had contained something that could have been exchanged for incredible amounts of money—Martian diamonds, those pale pure crystals of living light that are so highly prized by the natives of Mars, and no less highly prized by the wives of the millionaires of earth. There had been diamonds in the belt, diamonds that belonged jointly to Red Kelly and Ann Roberts. They were still in the belt, but Kelly didn't have it. Knuckles Roker had it.

KELLY had come into possession of the gems honestly. Befriending a dying Martian, he had been rewarded with a map showing the location of his tribe's hoard of gems, hidden in the ruins of one of the old abandoned cities on the Martian deserts. This had happened in Mars City, the only human settlement on the red planet. Kelly had been broke at the time. He had in his possession a map worth uncounted thousands of dollars, but to take advantage of the opportunity he had to have

a paltry five hundred dollars, for supplies, food, rental on a desert buggy, the expensive odds and ends that go into a desert expedition. Then a space ship bringing tourists from earth had landed. Ann Roberts had been on that ship.

Once—to Red Kelly it seemed thousands of years in the past—they had been in high school together. Then he had come to Mars, stowing away on a space ship, a kid looking for adventure and for fortune. He had found plenty of adventure but not the fortune. He had forgotten the girl. Then, a school teacher tired of teaching and taking an interplanetary vacation, she had turned up. Kelly could never remember clearly what had happened after that. Inexplicably he had found himself telling her about the map he owned, the chance it offered. She had offered to finance the trip as an equal partner. Kelly had said, "No!" a hundred times. Eventually, much against his better judgment, he had said yes.

The only desert buggy immediately available in Mars City had been owned by Knuckles Roker. They had rented it and had rented him to drive it. The map had been true and correct. They had found the gems—and Roker had seen them.

Now Roker had them, and gun in hand, he was leaning against the desert buggy deciding what to do with the two people who owned them.

"I oughta knock youse two off," he said meditatively. "That way I wouldn't be takin' any chance of youse ever turning up and making trouble. But if I knock youse off, this damned desert will turn youse into mummies and one of these danged desert tribes will find youse. Because youse is human, they will ship you into Mars City. There the sawbones will find youse died of lead poisoning and they'll tell the law and the law will go nosing around and

asking how come. Especially, they'll ask me, because youse came out here in my buggy. Even if I've gone back to earth, they'll send some johnny dick around to ask questions—"

He shook his head. Thinking was hard for Knuckles Roker. Only when he could think aloud could he think at all. Never, in all his thinking, had moral considerations bothered him. The fact that he was deciding whether or not to murder two humans did not enter into the problem. The only difficulty was to decide whether it would be safer to kill them or to leave them alive and let the desert take care of them.

Scowling, he fingered his gun.

RED Kelly held his breath. Would Roker kill them outright or would he maroon them here?

"If I leave youse here," Roker said, speaking aloud again, "The desert'll get you, sure. Then, when I go back to Mars City, I can say a tribe of Martians jumped us when youse was away from the buggy and knocked youse off or took youse away, I don't know which. I barely managed to get out alive myself —"

His scowling face cleared. He grinned at them. "Heh! That's perfect, by gosh! Not a chance of that missing."

It was a good plan, Kelly knew, if it worked. There wasn't much white law on the planet. No one would be inclined to question Roker's story in Mars City. Too often had the desert tribes captured and enslaved lone prospectors for there to be any novelty in the situation. No one would even attempt to rescue them, knowing it would be impossible to find them in the thousands of square miles of desert on the planet. And the heat of sandy wastes would take their lives as effectively as a slug from a pistol. No,

there wasn't much chance of Roker's plan missing—if it worked as he thought it would work.

"Listen, Knuckles," Kelly said quickly. "You can't leave us here like this." He was putting on an act. He knew that Roker had already reached a decision, but it would not do for them to accept that decision too tamely. It might make the renegade suspicious.

"The heck I can't!" Roker answered. Gun covering them, he backed into the car, slamming shut the heavy door. The motor roared. Throwing sand, the giant wheels began to turn. Moving ponderously but steadily, the buggy rolled away. Heat waves rising from the sand began to blur outlines before it was two hundred yards away. It went out of sight around a rocky knoll. The labor of its exhaust died away into the distance.

Red Kelly wiped beads of sweat from his face. He looked at the girl. "I'm sorry, Ann," he said. "I knew Roker was no good but I didn't think he had enough guts to hold us up."

The girl tucked a wisp of brown hair up under the rim of her sun helmet. "It's all right, Red," she answered. "I was looking for glamour and adventure when I came here. Well, I've found them. Now if you will only find this spring you were talking about——" She laughed gayly. "Think of it! I'm marooned in the desert with a red-headed prospector."

She wasn't much worried, Kelly saw. She didn't know this desert as he knew it, didn't know how treacherous, how tricky, and how deadly it really was. She didn't know, as he did, that even after they had found the spring, and assured themselves of a supply of water, that the odds were still against their ever escaping alive from this hell of sand.

With the spring, they had a chance.

It wasn't a good chance, but it was still a hope. The water there would at least keep them alive. Roker had made a mistake in dumping them so near the spring. He had unwittingly given them a chance.

It was his job, Kelly grimly thought, to make good on that chance.

FURNACE heat beat upon them from all directions as they trudged across the desert, heat from the distant sun, pouring through the thin atmosphere, heat rising in waves from the sand.

"If there would only be a breeze——" Ann Roberts panted.

But there wasn't a breeze. There was not enough life in the thin air to support a breeze. This place was dead, and mummified, and deserved to be forgotten. Once a year rain fell here. Or was it once a century? Red Kelly did not know. His throat was beginning to parch and his skin was beginning to turn dry.

There was little life here, a few plants like cacti, a few insects, and occasionally in the rocky hills they saw *droon* monkeys, little furry, round-faced creatures as gray as the rocks they hid among. Kelly caught glimpses of the monkeys staring curiously at them. They could live here. Kelly knew that the little creatures had an extremely acute sense of smell, so keen that they could scent water dozens of feet underground.

He popped a salt tablet into his mouth and trudged on.* Roker apparently forgotten to take their salt tablets away from them.

"How—how much farther is it?" Ann Roberts questioned.

* The tablets were used on Mars just as they were used on earth, to replace vital salt lost to the body through perspiration.—Ed.

Roker had dropped them in mid-morning. The sun was slanting westward now, as the planet rolled slowly on its axis. They had spent at least five hours in the merciless heat. Kelly looked at the girl. Her face was wan with coming heat fatigue. Her throat her hands, every unprotected spot on her body, was blistered with sunburn, the terrible sunburn of Mars.

"Another hour," he said. "We'll be there." He pointed toward a jagged ravine that they were approaching. "It's down this ditch. Just a little farther—"

She didn't say it but he knew how terribly she was suffering from thirst, knew it because he was suffering too. All moisture had long since left his throat. His voice was a dry croak, barely above a whisper. And—worst of all—already dreams of water were coming into his mind, lakes, with tree-lined shores, springs gushing from rocks, park fountains sending sprays into the air, taps marked "Ice Water" from which delicious streams forever flowed. It was the beginning of the heat madness, these water dreams.

He forced them out of his mind. They went reluctantly. They would come again, stronger, more persistent. And in the end, sometime late today or early tomorrow, they would come for the last time, as a mirage, a glistening stream running before his eyes, a lake, fountain. He would run toward the water and it would recede before him and he would keep running and it would continue receding—.

His voice a dry rattle, he cursed Roker.

At the edge of the ravine they found in the sand the tracks of *dothars*, the camels of Mars, great, splay-footed beasts that the tribesmen used to cross these deserts. *Dothar's* tracks in the sand could have only one meaning. A

tribe, or a group of raiders, had passed this way.

They were going toward the spring.

"What are they?" Ann Roberts asked, staring at the tracks in the sand.

"Just a herd of wild camels," Red Kelly answered. Fear had leaped into his heart at the sight. He kept it to himself.

They reached the spring.

It was dry.

RED KELLY stared at the crack in the rock from which the stream of water had trickled, forming a murky, muddy pool below. There was dust in the pool now, dust. There was no water. There was little indication that water had ever been here.

The Martians who had been riding the *dothars* had stopped here. They, too, knew of this spring and had come here seeking water. They had dug a hole in the bottom of the basin, a hole that went down to bed rock.

The hole was dry to its bottom.

The Martians had pried into the crack between the rocks, seeking to open up the flow. They hadn't succeeded and had gone away.

There was no water here.

Kelly was aware that Ann Roberts was staring at the hole, her tongue moving over her parched lips, her gaze intent. She swayed. He caught her as she fell.

He carried her to the shade of the rocky ravine wall, fanned her gently. "Water," she moaned softly. "Water—"

"There isn't any water—" Kelly choked on the words. Heat beat in around them. His head felt light on his shoulders.

How long, ye gods of the deserts of Mars, how long would it be before—he choked off the thought.

A *droon* monkey chattered at them from the rocky lip of the ravine. It

was the only sound in the dry, hot stillness. Kelly was vaguely aware of the round, furry face peering curiously down at them as if the little creature was wondering about these strange two-legged animals that dared invade the deserts where only it could live.

"I'm sorry, Ann," he croaked. Her eyes were open, he saw. "Don't worry, Red," she whispered, "It's not your fault—"

But it was his fault. He shouldn't have let her come with him, he shouldn't have trusted Roker, he shouldn't have—

Why cry over spilled milk? He had let her come, he had trusted Roker. And this had happened. If the spring had been flowing, they would have had a chance. But it wasn't running. It was dry. Now there was no hope.

On the rocks above them the *droon* monkey chattered again. Kelly stared at it, a glaze forming in his eyes. It didn't mind the heat, and as for water—Slowly the glaze went out of Kelly's eyes. He remembered a trick an old prospector had once told him would work. He got to his feet.

"What is it?" Ann Roberts questioned.

"I've thought of something," he answered. He started to tell her what it was, then changed his mind. His idea might not work. No use raising hopes in Ann that would only have to be dashed to pieces. She couldn't stand much more. "Lie quietly," he said. "I'll be back in a moment."

He felt through his pockets, searching for a piece of cord, a length of wire, anything that would make a noose. His hope or life was tied up in a noose. He needed cord, wire. There was no cord in his pockets, no wire, no piece of string. He wondered dazedly if they were going to die for lack of a piece of string.

Then he remembered his boots.

They were high-topped miner's boots, with rawhide laces, brought from earth. He removed the laces and he had his piece of string. Slowly he fashioned it into a noose. He buried the noose in the sand and laid down, holding the end of the rawhide in one hand.

THE monkey chattered at him. It peered over the rocks at him, called insults down on him, squeaked in its rusty hinge voice at the strange figure lying so quietly there in the bottom of the ravine. It was a small monkey, not much bigger than a cat. Red Kelly hoped from the bottom of his heart that it was a curious monkey too.

He didn't move. The monkey came down from the rocks and threw sand at him. His lack of movement excited its curiosity. He watched it from slitted eyes. It was coming closer. He held his breath. It stepped on the spot where the noose was hidden. He jerked with all his strength.

A second later he had his arms full of a wildly screeching creature. He held it, petted it. It soon discovered that he did not intend to harm it and ceased its struggle to escape.

"Nice monkey," Red Kelly whispered, his voice a dry husk. It was a nice monkey. It was more than that. It was his hope of life.

Very slowly he began to feed it salt tablets from the supply he carried in his pocket. It spat the first one out, grimacing its round face. Then tasting the salt, it hunted in the sand for the fragments of the tablet.

Ann Roberts came slowly down the ravine to them.

"What on earth are you doing?" she questioned.

"Feeding salt to this monkey," Kelly answered.

"Oh, Red—" she whispered. She thought the heat had already got him,

that he was out of his head. There was sickness on her face as she watched him feed another tablet to the little creature. "Why can't we just die in peace and have it over with? Why do we have to suffer like this before we die?"

"We're not dead yet." Kelly answered.

She tried to smile at his effort to show courage. The effort left her face contorted.

"Had enough salt, old timer?" Red Kelly said to the monkey.

It licked its chops, refused the next salt tablet. It had had enough.

"Okay," Kelly said. "Here's where you start earning your keep."

He tied the end of his bootlace around the monkey's neck, making a leash, and set it on the sand.

A human being, coming unexpectedly upon the scene taking place in the bottom of that rocky ravine in the heart of the deserts of Mars, would have instantly concluded that he had come upon two lunatics escaped from a nut house. Of the three living creatures moving through the fierce heat of the dying day, only the activities of the monkey would have seemed intelligent, and not too intelligent at that. Tied at the end of a string, it was making its way along the bottom of the ravine, stopping and sniffing at every rock it passed, at the base of every bluff, for all the world like a dog visiting fire-plugs and telephone poles in a city on earth.

Behind the monkey, holding tight to the end of the string, was a tall young man, much blistered about the face and hands, and obviously on the verge of heat prostration. Behind the man came a girl. She stumbled as she walked.

The two humans were following that monkey with a devoted interest and attention that could not have been

greater if the little creature held their lives in the hollow of its furry paws.

JUST as the fierce sun was setting in the west, just as the chill of the approaching night was coming on, the monkey stopped at the base of a bluff and began to dig in the sand collected there. Instantly the tall young man was down on his knees and digging too. Then the girl tried to help. She was too exhausted to be of any assistance.

A half hour later, in the gathering night, a cracked voice could have been heard yelling, "Ann! Ann! We've got it! There's water here."

Under his eagerly scooping fingers, Red Kelly could feel the sand turning moist. He dug like a madman, like a fool. He could feel water splashing on his fingers now. *Water!*

A few minutes later he was gently dribbling drops of golden moisture into the mouth of Ann Roberts. At the same time he was shouting at the top of his voice.

"Water! Water! By god, Ann, that monkey did the job for us. The salt made him thirsty as hell and he started looking for water. With that keen nose of his, he found what he was looking for. That's the only way those monkeys can stay alive here in these deserts. They can smell water underground and dig down to it. Water, Ann! Drink up. Drink all you want!"

The girl drank slowly, not daring to drink too much too quickly. Red Kelly drank. The monkey drank. Red Kelly felt the terrible, cottony dryness leave his mouth. Cool drops poured down his throat. He had been terribly dehydrated by the hours they had spent in the desert, but now that they had found water, he could feel his strength returning.

They had won over the desert. There remained only to win over Roker. But

now that they had water, Roker would not be too difficult. Kelly knew that he could make water containers out of the stalks of the cacti and against the lesser gravity of Mars, a man could carry enough water to cover the remaining distance to Mars City. Days would be needed to cover that distance, but traveling by night, they could take all the time they wanted, now that they had water.

His shout of triumph echoed over the desert, echoed and abruptly died as something crunched on the bluff above him. He looked up.

Outlined against the starlight a *dothar* stood on the bluff, a *dothar* with a rider. They were so near that Kelly could see the long lance in the hands of the rider.

WHILE he watched not daring to breathe, he saw another Martian camel appear above them, and then another, and another, until there were a dozen of them, all with riders.

The raiding party whose tracks they had seen in the ravine above! The raiders had been near. They heard his shouts, and had come to investigate.

Silently fierce tribesmen stared down into the ravine. Then, at a hissed command from their leader, they began to urge their *dothars* down the rocky slope. As silent as ghosts, the great sure-footed beasts picked their way among the rocks.

Watching them with sick fascination, Kelly was aware that the girl had moved close to him. She didn't say a word but he could hear her panting for breath. She also knew the fate of humans captured by these terrible tribes of the deserts of Mars. Death was the best that could be hoped for, and that speedily. They couldn't run. The *dothars*, for all their apparent clumsiness, could move very swiftly. Besides,

these raiders probably hoped their victims would try to flee. Then they would have a chance to use those long lances in a game they loved to play, spearing their victims on the run.

"Our only chance is that they're friendly," Kelly whispered. And little enough chance of that, he thought. A few minutes later, he knew there wasn't any chance. A ring of lances surrounded them. The leader of the Martians motioned to one of his men, who urged his *dothar* forward. "Are these the ones?" the leader questioned.

The person thus addressed leaned forward on his *dothar*, scanned their faces. One of the moons of Mars was in the sky and the vault of heaven was brilliant with the light of stars, providing an illumination far better than the best moonlight on earth.

"I recognize them clearly," the Martian said. "Yes, these are the ones."

He spoke the universal tongue of the red planet, which Kelly understood.

"Good," the Martian leader said. Then he spoke to Kelly. "Where are the diamonds?"

Kelly gulped. These raiders were seeking the diamonds. How had they known?

"One of my men saw you find the hidden cache of my tribe," the leader explained. "We have been seeking you since that time. Somehow we lost you last night. Now we have found you again. Where are the diamonds? You have stolen the property of this tribe, and I, as leader, demand that it be returned."

"But I didn't steal them." Kelly burst out. "I helped one of your own people and in return, he gave me a map showing where the jewels were hidden. He said they belonged to his tribe, but what belonged to the tribe belonged also to him, and that for helping him, the jewels were mine. There was no

though of theft—" With the passing of the sun, the chill of outer space had crept in on the deserts. It was cold here in this rocky ravine, but in spite of that Kelly was suddenly sweating.

His words produced a stir among the Martians, though whether this was good or bad Kelly could not determine. The leader remained imperturbable. "You were given a map, you say?" he questioned.

"Yes," Kelly answered. "If those jewels belonged to you, then the Martian who gave me the map must have been one of your own tribe."

HE pounded his point home, for two reasons. These tribes were extremely loyal to their own clan. Kelly also knew that all property was held in common in a sort of primitive socialism, which meant that the Martian who had given him the map had a perfect right to dispose of the jewels to reward a benefactor. They belonged to the tribe all right, but he was part of the tribe, and he could give them away if he chose, answering only to the tribe for the way he disposed of the common property. Kelly dared to hope again. Because of their clan loyalty, these tribesmen would uphold the act of their dead comrade.

"Where is this map of which you speak?" their leader questioned.

"I—" Kelly began and stopped as suddenly as he had started. The map would prove his claim. It was signed by the name of the dead Martian. These people would recognize that name. But—the map was in the desert buggy. Roker had it. Kelly explained what had happened.

Again a stir ran through the rank of the tribesmen. But this time there was no mistaking its meaning. It was not friendly. Lance points dipped down until they were inches from Kelly. His

arm went protectingly around Ann Roberts.

"It's the truth," he insisted doggedly. "We were marooned this morning, without food or water—"

"And you are still alive, without water?" the leader questioned doubtfully.

"But we found water," Kelly answered. He pointed to the hole scooped out in the sand.

This produced a real stir. The Martians had not seen the hole, or seeing it had thought the two humans had been merely digging for water. Several of the raiders wheeled their mounts, sped to inspect the hole. Kelly could hear their excited voices. "Water! It is really water. The earthman has found it—" Even the leader whirled his *dothar* and went to inspect the spring Kelly had discovered. A few minutes later he returned.

"We will give you the benefit of the doubt," he said enigmatically. "If one of our tribesmen really gave you such a map, it is our duty to honor his decision. But, of course, we must be sure. We must have the map—"

"I told you what happened to the map," Kelly truculently replied. "I don't have it."

"Yes, I believe you said that once before. However—"

"But how can I give you a map I don't have?" Kelly demanded.

"You can't," the leader suavely answered. "That is why, if it exists and if your story is true, we are going to help you recover it. If you will show us the direction taken by Roker in his vehicle—"

Red Kelly scarcely believed his ears. If there was one word that was not in the vocabulary of these Martian tribes, it was mercy. They were as tough as the desert in which they lived, and as pitiless. But they had believed his

story and they were going to help him. It sounded like a miracle to him. Or were they planning some devious treachery known only to their cunning people?

"You mean you'll help us find Roker?" Kelly stuttered.

"I mean exactly that," the leader drily answered. "If you and your comrade will mount two of our spare riding beasts—"

ALREADY the Martians were leading spare *dothar* forward. They indicated that Kelly and Ann Roberts were to mount. As he started to swing up, he heard a sleepy chatter coming from the sand at his feet. Looking down, he saw the *droon* monkey. He picked it up.

"If we get out of this alive, old timer," he said fervently, "you're my mascot from now on."

He slipped the monkey into his pocket. It chattered gratefully, then went to sleep.

The Martians paused only long enough to water their beasts and fill their skin water bags. Then they were off, on the trail of Roker.

They found Roker at dawn, after picking up the tracks of the desert buggy in the middle of the night. He had stopped the vehicle to rest and he was sound asleep in the air-conditioned cab.

"Is that the man you seek?" the Martian leader questioned.

"Yes," Kelly answered. Here was a stroke of luck. Finding Roker asleep was the only fortunate thing that had happened to him during this entire trip. But after all, Roker had to sleep sometime.

"He is your enemy," the Martian leader said. "Do you wish to kill him while he sleeps?"

Such a suggestion was perfectly nat-

ural from a desert tribesman. They had a code of honor all right, but it was a tricky code, and it included taking every possible advantage of your enemy.

"You could use my lance," the Martian suggested, extending his weapon. "And run him through before he awakens."

After all—the thought passed through Kelly's mind—why shouldn't he do what this Martian suggested? Roker had marooned them, left them to die in the desert. Why should he expect any mercy?

The thought passed as soon as it came. Red Kelly came from earth. Roker was a crook and a renegade but Kelly could not kill him while he slept.

"No," he said. "But I'll take him just the same."

"As you prefer," the Martian said.

Kelly, as he slid from his mount and approached the desert buggy, was aware that the Martians were slowly and silently surrounding the vehicle. He paid little attention to them. Roker was the man he wanted. Quietly he worked the latch that opened the door. Then he was inside the roomy cab.

In the same instant Roker awakened. He took one look at the man standing in front of him and his hand flashed toward his pistol.

"This time you won't have a gun," Kelly said. He struck out and down, his fist landing with crushing force on Roker's arm. The pistol, half-drawn, clattered to the floor. Kelly reached for it.

As he bent over, Roker kicked him in the head with a hob-nailed boot.

"You dirty devil!" Kelly raged. Stars were exploding in front of his eyes. He fumbled for the pistol. His groping fingers didn't find it. Roker, in one explosive outburst, hurled himself at Kelly.

KELLY went down. He was only half conscious from the effects of the kick in the head and Roker had the strength and weight of a grizzly bear. The only thing Kelly could do was hold on and try to defend himself against the fingers searching for his throat. He held on. Talons clawed at his throat, fingers searching for his eyes.

In a fair fight— But this wasn't a fair fight; this was a grim battle for survival. They were both sprawled on the floor, Roker on top. Kelly locked his arms over Roker's back and rolled.

He rolled straight out the door of the buggy and fell with a thump on the sand. This time Roker was on the bottom. The fall knocked the wind out of him. Kelly scrambled to his feet.

"Get up," he grated. "And take what you've got coming."

Roker pulled himself erect.

Even the Martians, who were not experts on fist fights, said that it was a wonderful battle. They knew about lance fighting and knife fighting but the art of using the fists had never been discovered among them. They soon caught the idea, however, and looked on first amazed and then appalled that so much damage could be done with the weapons nature had furnished the human race. They saw Roker rock Kelly back on his heels with a blow to the point of the chin, then they saw Kelly bury his fist in the fat stomach of his antagonist, heard Roker grunt with pain. They saw Roker try to come to grips with the lighter man, saw Kelly dance away, saw his lean fists lance out, inflicting terrible damage on Roker's face. The Martians always enjoyed a fight. They enjoyed this one.

Red Kelly forgot all about the Martians. There was only one thing on his mind—that this man had marooned him and Ann Roberts on the desert. For that, this man would have to pay.

Kelly's fists drove into Roker's middle, and drove again, and again, cutting down the greater strength of the man. Then the fists began to open up the face, cutting gashes at the corners of the mouth, flattening the nose. They closed the right eye and began their deadly work on the left one.

It was a battle in the desert dawn of Mars, with the sun peeping over the distant hills of sand, and for witnesses, a tense circle of Martians and an equally tense human girl. There was one other witness, a *droon* monkey, who was held in the girl's arms and who chattered constantly, from the beginning of the fight to the end.

The end came. Roker was reeling. His flailing arms were going wide, his breath was coming in great gulping wheezes. Then Red Kelly stepped in, his left going straight to the button. All his weight was behind it. Roker seemed to come unhinged when the blow hit. He folded in the middle and at the knees, fell like a log and lay without moving.

Panting, Kelly bent over him, ripped the money belt from the bulging stomach.

"Here," he said, extending the money belt to the Martian leader, "are your diamonds."

The leader accepted them. "And the map?" he said.

Kelly entered the desert buggy, found the map in the compartment where he had placed it. He took it out.

"Here's the map," he said. "It will prove my right to the jewels."

He knew, the instant he handed the folded square of paper to the Martian, that the final moment had come. The Martians either accepted the map and granted their right to the gems, or they denied the authenticity of the map and declared that Kelly and the girl were no better than thieves, to be punished

as the thieves were punished according to the code of the desert.

KELLY held his breath as the Martian leader examined the map. Would he decide this map was genuine? Or would he decide that possibly the square of paper had been forged?

The Martian could make any decision that pleased him. They were within his power. And these tribesmen were tricky, treacherous.

The leader sighed. "The map is genuine," he said. "I recognize the signature of our comrade, whom you befriended. Since he gave the jewels to you, we have no choice but to comply with his command."

Smiling, he extended the money belt to Kelly. "Here, my friend. These belong to you."

Dazedly Kelly took them. "You really mean it?" he whispered.

"Of course we mean it," he smiled. Then the smile faded. "Now we have complied with the request of our dead comrade. We have given the jewels to you. There was, however, no guarantee made that we would not take them back."

The words were harsh. Out of the corners of his eyes Kelly saw that two of the Martians were drawing close to Ann Roberts. The others were urging their great mounts forward and—their lances were down, the points ready to run him through.

They had kept to their code. They had given him the jewels. But that completed the letter of the contract. Now they were free to take them back again.

"You treacherous dog!" Red Kelly said. He and Ann were trapped and he knew it. Against those lance points he did not have a chance. Even if he attempted to leap into the desert buggy, thrown lances would make a sieve of

his body before he reached the vehicle.

"You sneaking, crooked cur" he grated. There was no hope left. All he could do was tell the Martians what he thought of them. He told them just that. In the dawn light the face of the leader turned red as he listened to the words.

"That is our code," he said. "We have kept it to the letter."

"To hell with your code," Kelly raged. "Throw your lances and to hell with you."

He was terrible in his anger. From his saddle on the back of the giant *dothar* the leader stared down at him. Oddly the frown disappeared from his face. He began to smile.

"Brave words, my son," he said. "You try to trick us into an easy death and to seek death is the mark of a brave person, whether he be Martian or human. Nay, cease swearing at us. The jewels are yours, to do with as you see fit. Our code requires this. And you and your comrade are also free to go your way. That, also, is required by our code. I was merely testing your courage when I threatened you."

KELLY stopped in mid-sentence. From doubting eyes, he stared at the Martian. Was this another trick? Was the leader merely torturing him by raising false hopes. "Your code—" he faltered.

"A life for a life," the Martian answered. "You gave us our lives and in return we have no choice but to give your lives to you."

"I gave you your lives—" Red Kelly husked.

"Yes," the Martian leader answered. "We had expected to find water in the canyon where we found you. But the spring was no longer running. Our water bags were empty. Some of us, perhaps, would have won through to

other water, at the cost of terrible suffering, but many of us would have died. When you found that spring, you found life for you and life for us as well. Will we harm the man who saves us? Not in a thousand years!"

The voice rang in the silent desert air. Simultaneously the menacing lances were lifted, in salute. Red Kelly realized what had happened. The Martians had come to that same spring, seeking water. To them, also, water was life. And there was no water. They had faced the same fate he and Ann Roberts had faced. The desert played no favorites. When he had found water, he had saved his life and the lives of the Martians as well. He remembered how excited they had been when he said he had found water. No wonder they had been excited, had run so eagerly to drink. They, too, had known the thirst of the desert.

"Thanks," Red Kelly muttered. "Thanks—"

"You do not need to thank me," the Martian replied. "Instead thank that one." With the tip of his lance, he pointed to the chattering *droon* monkey, still cradled in the arms of Ann Roberts.

"Okay," said Kelly. "I'll do just that."

HALF an hour later he and Ann Roberts watched the tribesmen silently fade away into the distance. They were going back to their people, back to the deserts of Mars.

Kelly started the motors of the desert buggy. He and Ann Roberts were going back to Mars City. They were taking two passengers with them, Knuckles Roker, securely bound, and one *droon* monkey, very much unbound.

"We'll take you with us on our honeymoon," Red Kelly said, addressing the monkey. Out of the corner of his eyes, he was watching Ann Roberts. She looked startled at his words, then she smiled.

"Of course," she said.

"She agrees," said Kelly, still addressing the furry little creature. Very gravely, but very happily, he winked at the monkey.

With equal gravity, but with an expression of impish delight lurking on its round face, it winked back at him.

"That makes it unanimous," Kelly said.

MUMMIFIED HEADS

ONE of the oldest and most gruesome customs to which man has devoted himself is the mummification and shrinking of the heads of his enemies. One thinks of such practices with revulsion and horror, but nevertheless they are still quite common in many regions of South America.

It is ironic to realize that civilization, which has so determinedly fought against such debasing practices, has been, in a sense the agency which has actually promoted fresh outbreaks of these gruesome crimes. For, sadly enough, many tourists consider a shrunken native head a delightful and unique souvenir of their journeys to South America. And while they are willing to pay the price for these horrible reminders of man's savagery, there will always be traders and natives who will supply their demand.

The actual process of shrinking a head is a jealously guarded tribal secret. A German scientist vanished into the unexplored Pongo de Seriche—the land of the Jivaro—in search of this process, and the only clue ever found as to his whereabouts

was a shrunken head with light hair and a red beard which turned up for sale six months later in Panama.

The method differs in various tribes but the usual procedure begins with the killing of an enemy and the severing of his head. The scalp is slit, the skull removed and disposed of, and the shrinking process begins. The skin is stretched about a wooden handle and then thrust into boiling water to cause contraction. Then the head is filled with hot sand and kept constantly in motion in order that it may act on all parts of the head uniformly. As the sand cools, it is removed, the burnt tissue is scraped off, and the process is repeated.

As the head grows smaller the Indian works the features with his hands so that they will retain a life-like expression. When the head is reduced several times normal size and a natural expression maintained, the job is completed.

Tourists buy the finished product for around a hundred dollars!