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MISTS OF MARS

By **GEORGE A. WHITTINGTON**



Illustration by KIEMLE

BARRY WILLIAMS watched the last sunshine lance across the red sands of the Martian Desert. The sun dropped abruptly behind the flat horizon. With the black curtain of night, the usual sharp chill came to the thin Martian atmosphere.

The cold bit into Williams through the warm ore-seeker's outfit he'd adopted for this venture. He laughed suddenly, realizing why he noticed the cold. His body was tense, rigid. Unconsciously he was crouching, waiting, eyes narrowed, one heavily-gloved hand on his ray gun.

With the laugh, Barry relaxed, although his sharp blue eyes never ceased their wary sweep over the rolling sands. His hand dropped from the weapon. It would be useless anyway against the deadly white mist, for which he waited.

That it would come, Barry never doubted. It was known and dreaded by Earthmen in every Terrestrial Center on the red planet. In the past few weeks, Earthmen had disappeared, vanishing for the last time into the Martian night. Whispers said the white mist, the pale nemesis, sucked the life from them.

Only once had Earthmen seen the mist and lived to tell of it. A spaceship, beating toward one of the Centers on a night flight from a desert camp, had passed over a pale patch on the red sand. Its occupants, in their haste did not stop to investigate. Only later, telling of the strange sight, did they realize it had been mist—on a planet too arid for water vapor. Only then did they remember seeing an Earthman making his way on foot toward the same Center, within the patch.

Barry Williams' searching glance covered the terrain once more. Deimos, the smaller moon, was already high. The larger, swifter Phobos was rapidly overhauling its companion. Under their light,

"Kill all Martians," the orders read. "They are savages, and have no rights." But Special Investigator Barry Williams and Princess Deisanocta had other plans—plans that would bring destruction to the despoilers by releasing an age-old justice from the Crypts.

the scene was clear. But it was so every night on Mars, yet Earthmen who ventured into the desert at night died! Barry waited.

He waited as had the occupants of that Center for the man to come in and tell the story of that strange light patch against the red sand. In the morning a searching party brought in his body. The story would never be told by him.

Nor by any other Earthman, it seemed. Later, a spaceship again sighted the mist, and radioed that it was landing to investigate. Again, Earthmen, now frightened and grim, waited through the Martian night. Once more, a daylight searching party found only the dead.

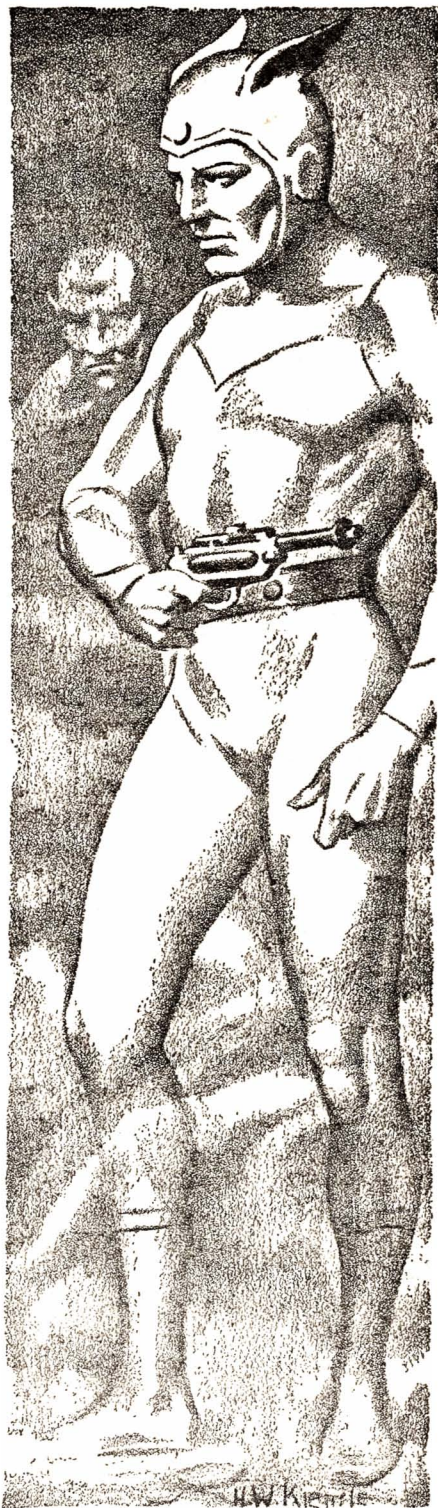
"Ain't fer human understandin'," one superstitious miner whispered in awed tones. "Twenty year I bin on this cursed planet—nor ever heerd the like o' this."

"It's clear enough for me," answered a pink-cheeked youngster up to Mars to make a fortune in rich ore dust. "I stay off the desert at night. Only the miserable Martians can live out there then."

"Justice from the Crypt," a third muttered, quoting the threat of an old Martian, dying from wounds he'd received fighting Earthmen. "It's like from the grave—this mist, the way it creeps from the sand white and ghostly!"

That was the spirit Barry Williams, special investigator for the Terrestrial Bureau of Martian Affairs, found when he arrived. Behind the fear were rumors, dead bodies, nothing more. At first, he'd blamed superstition and the natural hazards of work in the desert. But now he was here in the desert at night, waiting.

IT WASN'T for this he'd been sent to Mars, Barry told himself half-angrily. His mission here was important. But this threat to all Terrestrials on Mars was



Williams waited, seeing her come through the mists,

ominous. There were no government agencies to deal with the threat here. Mars was just a frontier where untold riches lay for the taking beneath some of the red sand.

The sullen, cowed Martians, working at the bigger mines, or following their nomadic courses across the desert no longer attempted an organized government. Despite their great majority in numbers, the Martians played no part in running the planet. How they must be rejoicing now, Barry thought, as death stalked their conquerors, death striking from the desert in the night.

Suddenly, Williams felt an icy tingle course through his blood. His hand dropped again to his ray gun, tore it from the holster. He stood erect, fighting an urge to crouch low against the danger.

Along the crest of the sand-swell before him, something was rising. Bright moonlight shimmered as the rays broke against a pale barrier.

To the right, the left, behind him, it was the same. The white mist was rising, surrounding him. Escape was cut off. Even to reach his nearby spaceship was impossible without cutting through. Barry tried to relax. There was nothing to do but wait.

He remembered the words of the old Martian desert wanderer to whom he'd spoken. This man had once been a chieftain, before the conquest of Mars by Earth. His keen black eyes had bored into Barry.

"If you wish the answer," he'd advised, "go into the desert at night. *You* are different—*you* may return. I can tell you no more."

Thicker grew the mist. A silver blanket, wrapping closer and closer about Barry Williams. The moons and the barren landscape were blotted out. All perspective vanished. High above, a tiny patch of stars was visible—perhaps for the last time to Williams.

He gripped the ray gun tighter. The strange white blanket touched his skin now—seemed to press against him with a great weight. He raised the gun grimly, then a picture flashed into his mind.

One of the bodies that had come out of the desert had been shown him. The

dead fingers still gripped a ray gun. They had crushed against the trigger for a long time—until the badly overheated weapon had at last burned out, charring the unfeeling hand that had held it. But the power that had brought oblivion had stood up against the ray.

With a grim smile, Barry replaced his weapon. The blanket was tight around him now. He could see nothing. His limbs grew numb under overpowering lethargy. His lungs labored, sucking in the mist. Consciousness wavered. He reeled, stiffly. His muscles hardened, his braced feet sinking deep into the sand.

Before his glazing eyes, a strange picture formed in the mist. A beautiful Martian maiden, tall, slim, majestic—veiled in silver mesh. On her lovely features was a look of stern judgment.

WAS IT FANCY, or did the chanting of voices ring in his ears, muffled weirdly by the shroud about him? "Day—ees—a—nocta—— Day—ees—a—nocta."

The picture, the sounds faded. At last his knees sagged. He pitched face downward into the red sand.

For what seemed a long time, Barry Williams floated in darkness. Then, to a tiny corner of his mind, consciousness returned. He fought to retain it. The mist,



he realized dimly, did not harm the body—it paralyzed. While he could think, the battle was not lost. He called upon the deep reserves of his mind.

Suddenly he was aware of sand digging painfully into the skin of his face—the first physical sensation he'd know since he slumped forward into oblivion. Hands tugged at his body, and the sting of the sand was gone from his nostrils. He had been rolled over onto his back.

Wild hope surged through Barry. He struggled against the leaden weight on his eyelids—without success. His muscles did not respond. He tried to move an arm—a leg—a finger. It was no use. Slowly, he realized what had happened.

Some power ruled his mind—had overcome it while he was unconscious. For some reason, he had been *allowed* to regain a very limited consciousness—just so much and no more! Perhaps he would learn the answer to this mystery. Why had the white mist not destroyed him?

A murmur of voices beat against his ears. He'd been given back his hearing! The voices were low, soft. They spoke in a language foreign to him—Martian he guessed. Words faded away. There was a moment's silence, then the chant he had heard before.

Above Barry, a voice spoke to him in inter-planetary Esperanto:

"Son of Earth, you are not as the other Earthmen who come here to rob this unhappy planet, and slay its children."

The voice was that of a woman, clear, musical, unutterably sweet—pathetically sad. It paused; spoke again. A new note crept into the words, ringing, thrilling:

"Go your way—leave in peace, but travel far from this planet. The Mist of Mars will destroy all those who remain to despoil and murder here."

Williams felt consciousness slipping from him once more. He struggled to speak. He must speak! These people must be told of his mission here!

But his lips would not move. Struggle was useless. Feeling was gone from his body. The last sound he heard was the voice of a man, deep and full:

"Heed the warning of the Mother of Mist. This once you have been spared."

II

BARRY opened his eyes as the red sun climbed over the rim of the rolling desert. His head was clear, his mind refreshed and alert. These symptoms strengthened his convictions that he'd been hypnotized.

The power of a highly trained mind was being used in this campaign against Earthmen. Perhaps the mist was produced both to hide the operator and to frighten the victim—making the latter easier prey to force that invaded the brain, and had literally torn out the life essence of the other victims.

Shrugging off further speculation for the moment, Barry climbed painfully to his feet. His muscles were stiff and cramped from lying hours on the ground. He flexed his arms and legs, worked his fingers, getting out the soreness. Then he started for his spaceship.

As the rockets throbbed behind him, Barry tried all the controls. The little ship whipped through every intricate maneuver he'd ever known. It slowed his progress, this senseless stunting, but it showed him the ship was in prime condition, answering his every touch on the controls.

Why was he doing this? It was as if he were going on a trip. Yet he had no such intention. The mist had spared him, and was gone.

The mist! The thought brought the answer to his strange preparations—hypnosis again—post-hypnotic suggestion!

Having spared him and ordered him to flee the planet, the being behind the mist had meant him to remember the advice.

Barry's lips set in a straight line, and hard little muscles stood out on his cheek, along his strong jaw. He hadn't the slightest intention of fleeing Mars. He'd been sent here for a purpose by the Terrestrial Government, and he had come to realize the whole deadly threat of this Martian scourge against Earthmen was tied up with the reason for his being here. Barry William was staying on Mars till he'd finished his job.

Below him, the circular, thick-walled, high-domed Center flashed over the horizon and loomed larger in the lower view-

plate before Barry on the control board. Soon he was close enough to see the narrow apertures, where, in the early days of Terrestrial occupation, mighty ray cannon had blasted against bands of Martians who still had crude weapons to use against the victors.

Barry put his ship down neatly in a semi-circular row of other craft. There were, he noticed, more ships parked outside than was usual for a post not close to the bigger mine. One of them was a large, ornate cruiser type, on which was painted in neat gold letters: "*Grey Enterprises, Inc.*"

It was the personal, space-going ship of Craig Grey, billionaire ore-king, himself. The latter was probably inside the Center. That would account for the unusual number of ships, for Grey never travelled anywhere without a large following.

As Barry stepped through the door-lock onto the field, a small knot of men, dressed for travel, stopped outside the building door. They stared open-mouthed at the Government identification letters on Barry's craft, then at him.

Obviously, they'd turned and bolted inside—bolted with a speed and singleness of purpose that seemed like panic!

Puzzled, Barry pushed aside the heavier, outer door. From inside, an excited murmuring of voices came through the second door.

SILENCE fell over the big room within, as he entered. Every man there, most of them free-lance ore-seekers, was in the crowd pressing around one man who stood against the bar. That man was easily recognizable, for his picture had been printed from Mercury to Pluto. He was Craig Grey. A subordinate stood on each side of him, keeping the others at a respectable distance.

Grey looked at Barry with bleak, cold eyes. The ore-king was a dapper little man, who apparently fought his advanced years with the aid of science. His hair was coal black, as was the tapering, precise mustache—though both should have been gray long ago. He lifted a well-manicured hand, and sucked on a cigarette through a long holder. Despite his culture and small stature, Barry Williams sensed that this

man could be a deadly enemy.

The glowing cigarette in its long holder swept out in a graceful arc toward the men Barry had seen outside. "This is the searching party that was about to set out for you, Williams," said Grey in a flat, thin voice. "A spaceship reported seeing you last night on the desert—with the white mist closing in."

"Very decent of you fellows to worry," Williams said amiably. "I came in under my own power."

His words fell into a silence that was tenser than before. They had just been discussing him, Williams was positive. Grey, who had never seen him, had known his name!

Barry said nothing. He waited calmly for the answer to this odd reception. Somehow, he sensed hostility in the Earthmen here.

Beneath the poised, still friendly gaze of his blue eyes, the others grew restless. Feet shuffled. Murmurs came from the rear of the group.

"These Martian savages are behind this mist."

"They're out to kill all us Earthmen," came another voice.

And a third questioned: "How could a man get out of that mist alive?"

"Unless he's a friend of those killers," finished another.

The color of Barry's eyes deepened into the blue-grey of carbon steel. "I owe explanations only to Earth Government!" he snapped. "Is that clear?"

Murmurs rose again—angry now, and the faces of the men grew dark and menacing. But Grey waved his long cigarette holder for silence. He was the unquestioned leader on Mars. His company owned most of the largest mines.

He spoke coolly: "What you say may be true, Williams, but we feel we've a right to some answer. After all, my company has billions invested here. And these men," his gesture took in the miners and ore-seekers, "have their lives invested. All of us are threatened by this mist."

"Fair enough," said Barry Williams. "I'll be glad to tell you, since you're asking."

He told them briefly of his encounter with the mist. When he'd finished, the taut silence in which they'd listened was

snapped by angry mutterings. This time the anger seemed directed against the accusations of the Martian maiden, rather than against Barry.

"Those savages calling *us* murderers!"

CRAIG GREY'S voice was scornful. "Ridiculous of course. These creatures are human only in superficial resemblance." He drew deeply through his long holder, and blew a great cloud of smoke toward Barry. "Of course, *you* know that Earth laws have declared them savages, and provided that none save humans of Earth descent can hold property on Mars, or citizenship in the Earth state. How could we murder or rob them—since they're not human and own nothing?"

"True—and interesting," conceded Williams. "I know too the laws were passed on suggestion of exploring parties sent here by three big inter-planetary combines, of which your own was the largest. That was fifty years ago. You were at the head of your company then—excuse me for giving your age away." Williams was speaking slowly, thinking his way. Some of the puzzle of Mars was unfolding as he spoke, against this background of resentful Earthmen.

"Those laws gave you and your friends control of great wealth in the ore mines. You broke the resistance of the Martians, and used some as cheap labor in the mines. The others had to find ore dust and sell it to you for a song, to buy food and other things from you at your price. And they had to avoid being shot by ore-seekers who wanted the dust."

Again the other men growled toward Barry.

"Martian lover!"

"Justice from the Crypt, eh? We'll send you back there!"

"'Tain't murder or robbery to kill savages!"

"Go running back to Earth with that phoney story."

"No!" he answered them. "I'm not leaving Mars until I finish my job. The Bureau of Martian Affairs sent me here to see if some educational program could be started among the Martian savages. I think it could. These people could pass for Earth citizens in the streets of Washington itself. As soon as I get to the bot-

tom of the mist, and stop it, I'll be ready to go back with my recommendation.

The men began to surge toward Barry. Apprehension, as well as anger showed in their faces. What he suggested would mean the end of their chances to exploit the planet and its people so freely—and of Mars as a frontier.

"I don't think you'll get away with this, Williams," Craig Grey said softly. "You've admitted being on the side of the Martians who are trying to kill us!"

"I'll put the first man who raises a hand under arrest," said the other just as softly.

"That's a bluff I'll call," snarled a big man. He was one of the subordinates who'd stood beside the ore-king. Now he hulked forward, hand dropping slowly toward the belt where two ray guns dangled. "You won't be arresting anyone! Every Earthman on Mars will be after you—just like I am!"

"I'll have to take your weapons," Barry began. To exert his authority as a representative of Earth Government now might save the situation—if he could make it stick.

But an ugly look, spreading across the big man's face, pulling at his thick lips and blazing from his eyes was the answer. It was the look of a murderer, and there was no mistaking his intention as he brought up a ray gun.

"You can have them—this way," he sneered. The other men in the Center scattered for cover, their faces relieved that the threat Barry represented was to be so quickly removed.

But Earth Investigators were well trained. Barry Williams' ray crossed the other. The big man fell, life burned out of him. Barry swung the weapon in his hand significantly about the men.

"If this is the way you want it, there's an example of what will happen to anyone else who tries to stop me. And don't forget, I represent the authority of Earth Government!"

He backed toward the door, watching them warily. "It won't be wise for the rest of you to try to follow me!"

Outside, he made for his ship at a dead run. Ray beams were splashing into the red sand at his feet, when he entered the

port. Safe behind the apertures of the Center, the men were trying to cut him down.

BARRY blasted his ship into the air, and watched the Center grow small behind and below him. His lips were set in a straight, tight line, while his mind went over his position.

Grey would fan the hostility of all the Earthmen on Mars against him. Barry was sure from what he'd seen of the Martians that they were far from the savages they'd been called by explorers financed by Grey and his associates. They were an intelligent peaceful race, uneducated and unadvanced, but intelligent.

Earth Government had been misled into oppressing them, and Grey had profited enormously. The ore-king would stop at nothing to keep Barry Williams from destroying the set-up. Already he'd connected Barry with the white mist, a Martian attempt to win freedom and revenge—an attempt that Barry must stop!

The white mist meant the killing of Earthmen, and the rebellion would convince Earth Government that the Martians were savages. Barry Williams wanted to save human lives—even the lives of those who were murdering and robbing on Mars under the flimsy pretext of these laws. And he wanted to see justice done on Mars.

These things were not very probable, though, Barry knew. Grey's clever move had trapped him on Mars. He hadn't enough fuel in his ship to reach Earth, nor was his radio strong enough to contact the planet. With the Earthmen trying to kill him, he'd be unable to get supplies. And the Martians had warned him to leave the planet—a second time the white mist might not spare him!

Still, his only chance was to reach the Martians who were behind the white mist. If he could convince them of his intentions—he had to convince them! Then they might help him reach Earth; and hold off their ominous attacks against Earthmen until he could put the situation before the Government of Earth. If he could manage that, Barry was sure he could save human lives and do justice on Mars!

He had to find the Martians! Barry brought his ship down low over the red

sand and started his search. He knew that hostile Earthmen, armed to the teeth and intent on killing him, were searching also.

Their search was successful, while he still looked vainly for Martians. Not even a nomadic wandering native was moving over the sands. And the blazing midday of the red planet brought the end of Barry Williams' opportunity.

"These natives know something is up," he was musing. Above him, the sun was a ball of flame, its rays blistering, blinding through the thin atmosphere.

It was out of this blind spot that a voice snapped across Barry's thoughts like a whiplash: "The game's up, Williams."

He knew then that his thoughts had left him open to attack.

"You heard me, Williams."

The latter knew that cold, precise voice. It was Craig Grey. Barry could not see the ship, but he knew the ore-king's cruiser would be hovering high above, safely out of sight in the sun's rays. And from that focal point of his enemies, the ether began to crackle with orders.

Other craft began to converge rapidly on the spot, very close to where the investigator had the white mist. They ringed Barry as the mist had, closed in. Their blazing ship rays, in the nose of each craft, formed spokes to a wheel of which Barry Williams' ship was to be the hub.

He charged into that ring, broke it! He scattered them before him, some of them dropping downward with blazing hulls.

But, as often as he drove them before him, Grey's cold, hard face appeared in the visa-radio. His commands reformed the others, brought them back to the attack.

Finally, as Barry fought off another encirclement, the space cruiser of Craig Grey dropped unseen from above. Four red rays reached toward the investigator's ship, closed about it like the fingers of a hand.

Barry had no chance to turn and make the prolonged ray contact it would have taken to damage the big, heavily-armored ship. His control board indicators flashed a bitter message in his eyes—his ship was lost! In the visa-plate before him, was Grey's exulting face, the long cigarette holder clamped between the thin, smiling lips. Above, like good dogs closing for the kill, the ships were following Barry down behind the pack-leading cruiser.



III

WILLIAMS got his wrecked craft on an even keel somehow, and spun her with his side jets to keep her even. His trip down was an incredibly swift repetition of these movements, designed to land the ship on the red sands with a cushioning belly-smack.

They were following him down to make sure he did not escape the crash alive—to ray the smashed ship into an incandescent heap of metal! At the last moment, Barry stretched out a leg, and kicked hard at the emergency door-lock lever release.

Whipped open by the air-wash, the door was waiting as he leaped from the seat. With a last look at the viewscreen—showing the red terrain flashing into his face—he spun out into the air a second before the crash. Darkness swept over him as he landed!

It was not the darkness of unconsciousness. He'd landed on his back, pulled by steel muscles into an arc that rocked the impact from his hurtling body.

But, somehow, a covering was over his eyes, and two men lay beside him, one on either side. They spoke softly to each other over his head in a language Barry recognized but could not understand; Martian!

He'd found the Martians all right, the hard way! But Grey and his men would ray them all out of existence in a matter of seconds. Overhead the rockets of the ore-king's ships thundered closer. They'd

seen his body hurtle from the wreck, and were searching! He wished the Martians hadn't blindfolded him.

An intolerable glare from many ray beams beat through the covering over his eyes. This was it! The heat of those beams brought sweat through every pore of his body, but that was all. The drumming of rocket jets receded. They were leaving!

Why hadn't they seen him? They'd rayed his ship into a heap of molten metal that warmed him where he lay, yards away. But he and his captors were unhurt. Apparently, Grey and his men had decided they'd been wrong about seeing the investigator jump. They'd decided he was still in the wreckage. But why hadn't they seen Grey and the Martians?

The question was quickly answered. As the thrumming of rockets died in the distance, the two Martians pulled Barry to his feet. He blinked as sunlight struck his eyes, and looked about. The three of them were standing in the open, but a large square of rough cloth at their feet explained why the ships above hadn't spotted them. It was colored to blend into the red sand so perfectly it was almost invisible to Barry.

His respect for Martians leaped! A peaceful race they had been, before they were attacked and conquered. But now they were showing how fast they could learn. They'd mastered one of the most effective stratagems of warfare, camouflage.

The clothing of his Martian captors was

the same color as the cloth that had covered them, even to masks over the face. One of them tugged at Barry's arm and spoke softly in Martian. They wanted him to go with them. He went gladly. If they took him to their headquarters, he'd have the chance he wanted—to ask their help, and offer them his! His heart was beating wildly. Grey and his followers would learn that Earth Government had an answer for fraud and injustice!

His respect for the Martians increased again, when he was taken through a cleverly concealed passage into a sandwell. Inside was a rough room, ingeniously hewn and held from collapsing inward.

Here were three more Martians, garbed as his captors were. One sat before a visaradio. This group of Martians was well organized! They'd salvaged equipment from wrecked and abandoned ships.

ONE of Barry's companions went to the radio and spoke rapidly in Martian, apparently reporting. The view screen was blank, but Barry heard the Martian use the word, "Deisanocta," and something clicked in his mind! The chanting he'd heard last night in the mist, "Day-ess-a-nocta!" Was it the name of the lovely Martian girl, she who seemed to be the leader of these men? One of them had spoken of her respectfully as the Mother of Mist.

It was she he wanted to speak to, Barry Williams realized. And it was her voice that struck his ears a moment later, answering the report of the man! Her words were soft, gentle yet commanding. There was a timbre to her throaty voice that moved Barry, brought him a picture of her large, somber grey eyes against the clear white of her face.

"Deisanocta," he cried, starting suddenly forward. "I must speak to you!"

His captors seized him roughly. Their faces were horrified. Barry realized he had probably violated some form of Martian royal etiquette—for this girl was undoubtedly a Martian princess. There had been royalty on Mars when the Earthmen came, although the line had been believed destroyed during the conquest.

Again the soft voice came into the room through the radio, still speaking in Martian. A few words, and the instrument clicked dead.

"Wait!" cried Barry. But it was useless. The girl had ignored him, and cut the connection.

Two of the Martians held Barry Williams firmly, although no longer roughly. Another had gone to a little cabinet.

He came toward Barry, a hypodermic needle in his hand. Struggle was useless. Barry extended his arm with a smile, and saw admiration in the other's eyes.

There was a sharp, momentary pain in his arm as the needle was expertly inserted. Then a sensation of well-being, flooded the Earthman. A warmth flowed through his veins, and pounded a flush into his face. There was nothing else.

The Martian went back to the cabinet, came again toward Barry. This time he extended his hand, in the palm of which lay two white tablets. The look on the Martian's face was clear. Barry Williams must take them, of his free will or forcibly.

Again Barry accepted graciously, and saw the Martians smile in approval. He gulped down the tablets. It was only brief seconds later that he sagged toward the ground. There was no sensation save a weariness, a heaviness of his limbs and eyes. Darkness rolled over him, soft and deep and comfortable blackness.

BARRY WILLIAMS' will tugged at his eyelids, as his consciousness returned. They responded sluggishly, reluctantly. His muscles, too, resisted, with a numbness that revealed he'd slept a long time. Beneath him, the red sand of the Martian desert was his couch.

When, finally, his blue eyes focused, he saw nothing; nothing save a white blanket that folded about him on every side—the mist! Struggling to his feet, he moved stiffly a few steps, to the right, the left, forward, back.

There was nothing anywhere except that blanket of mist. No stars, no bright moons! The sand at his feet was almost obscured by the silvery curtain.

Barry's mind was clearing, and he stopped short with a sudden realization. Yesterday—or had it been yesterday, there was no telling if it was night or day—the mist had oppressed his senses, brought him to his knees paralyzed and helpless! Yet, now, it had no effect.

He breathed deeply, remembering how

his lungs had labored and his mind reeled the last time. But the mist was refreshing as the purest air, and his mind remained clear.

The hypodermic they'd given him! It must be an antidote to the drug that was in the mist—for Barry was now sure the mist was a depressive drug, meant to paralyze and terrify. The dead Earthmen had not died from the mist itself, but from some power that struck under cover of that terror!

But the Martians had immunized him! Barry shrugged. Perhaps he'd convinced them he was a friend, and they'd stamped him with this immunity that all their fellows might know him from the other Earthmen who were enemies—

The thought brought a sudden chill to Barry Williams' spine! He'd been walking, first slowly, then, as his legs lost their stiffness, more and more rapidly. Yet, still the mist was all about him. Never in its ghostlike appearances before had the mist covered more than a small patch of the desert!

These thoughts began to add together in his mind. Immunizing him—a fiend, putting him to sleep so that he would be unable to argue or resist until he could be safely disposed of, the extent of the mist. All this could mean—

"This is it," Barry groaned aloud. "This is the revolt!

"The first appearances of the mist were to terrorize, and to test! This is the real thing; the mist over the whole surface of Mars, organized Martians striking under its cover!"

His words came back to him from the hateful white blanket, muffled and run together into unintelligible echoes.

"You failed—failed!" the echoes seemed to mutter. "Earthmen will die—Earth troops will come against the 'savages.' No justice for Mars!"

Barry shook his head angrily against his imaginings. Suddenly, he stumbled and pitched forward over something at his feet.

His heart sank at sight of the gruesome thing in the sand. A dead Earthman—but not unmarked as had been the earlier victims of the white mist. This man had been killed by violence, killed as he lay unconscious, overcome by the mist drug!

"This is it," Barry groaned again. An-

other form of death was striking under the silver blanket. This man had been a murderer and exploiter, but to Earth Government he was a citizen killed by savages!

Barry Williams stumbled on dazedly. There was nothing he could do! He stumbled over another body and passed on. A third form appeared in the sand at his feet. He started to turn aside, then stopped.

QUICKLY he bent over the figure, his hand going to the pulse. There was a heartbeat, and the chest moved slightly with breathing! This body was alive, there were no wounds. Peering into the face, Barry realized it was a Martian!

A Martian overcome by the mist. After puzzling a moment, Barry laughed. Of course! All the natives couldn't have been in on the plans—not even most of them. Therefore, they'd be drugged and put to sleep like the Earthmen.

Martians overcome by the means that was to free them! Barry's mind was racing. Free them! That was it! They'd be needed for the fighting. The other Martians, the organized ones under Deisanocta, would come to give immunizing injections to such of their fellows as this one Barry found on the sand!

With the realization, Barry Williams threw himself down on the ground. He couldn't be far from the place they'd captured him. That meant, the vicinity of the Martian Princess' headquarters. Perhaps she herself would come, searching for her followers.

She did. She came silently, short minutes later, moving like a wraith in her silver mesh costume, that somehow made her seem part of the mist. Mother of Mist. Barry remembered the title.

The silver accents of her voice came clearly to his ears. She spoke in Martian. Two of her men appeared beside her. One went toward the fallen Martian, something in his hand that Barry knew would be a hypodermic syringe. The other saw Barry, started toward him.

"Hold everything!" Barry leaped up. "I am no enemy."

The other paused, he knew there could be only one Earthman who walked through the mist unharmed. Barry's eyes went to Deisanocta.

"Princess, I must speak to you!"

She came closer, until her face was clear before him. Her grey eyes glowed softly. "I know of your mission here, Barry Williams," she said in her throaty voice. "Your mind was open to me when first we met in the mist."

It had been she who hypnotized him! Barry nodded slowly, he'd suspected as much. "Then you must know I want to help your people. This fighting must stop. I promise you that, if I can reach Earth—if you will help me get a ship and fuel—I can win justice and freedom for your people!"

The girl's eyes flashed. "A free Mars will make its own peace with Earth," she cried. Here was the spirit not of savages—but of a free race Earth could respect! Her voice softened. "But thank you, Barry Williams. You have been spared because your purpose here was friendly, and because I—I—trust you."

"Now." Her eyes glowed from deep within, "You will sleep, Barry Williams, sleep the walking sleep under my will."

BARRY met her gaze, feeling the impact of her mind. For long moments, his eyes were locked with hers. A puzzled doubt appeared at last on her features.

"Sleep, Barry Williams," she murmured uncertainly.

"Sorry," he grinned. "There's no more power in the mist over my will—and you can't hypnotize me against my will. Hypnotism is a new art with your people, Princess. You forgot to condition me to your commands."

Deisanocta smiled. "An old Earthman implanted the science in my mind when I was but a child, being hidden from the oppressors. Much that is there, I do not know how to use."

"Won't you let me help you," asked Barry Williams. "If you ignore my advice, that's up to you."

She considered his words. Her eyes on his still glowed, but with a different light. "Very well," she said at last. "You may stay with me. After victory, you can be my emissary to Earth."

Barry walked beside her, the Martians of her party following respectfully behind.

"Why don't you take these men prisoners," Barry asked, "instead of killing them?"

Deisanocta answered sadly: "My people have been killed and beaten too long. I could not restrain them."

"Besides, these men could be dangerous. If some of my mist-producing units failed, those who sleep in that area would awaken after a few breaths of air. We would have enemies behind us." She smiled a little wistfully. "These Earthmen do not sleep as deeply as you did from those pills."

"You must capture Craig Grey alive," he said with sudden realization. "While he sleeps under the influence of the mist, you can hypnotize him. Then we can learn the details of his fraud, how he deceived Earth about your people! With names and facts, we can convict him—prove his guilt!"

"It shall be so," she promised. "Even now my followers are awakening those of our people who sleep. When all are gathered, we will move into the mine headquarters and the forts. We go slowly, for some of our enemies will be in spaceships, safe from the mist drug. But we will take enough weapons as we go to overcome them!"

"I hope," Barry muttered.

Deisanocta seemed not to hear him. Her grey eyes were alight, her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"The hour is very near," she said. "Mars shall be free!"

"Come, I must speak with my men."

She led the way toward a nearby sandswell, moving with that marvelous sense of direction that seemed a characteristic of Martians. For generations, they had made their way unerringly over the trackless desert. Now, even in the mist blanket that made objects invisible short feet away, the Princess did not falter.

Straight to a cleverly concealed door she walked, through, and into the same type of room Barry Williams had seen before. At her entrance, a Martian lowered his ready heat ray and stood respectfully for her commands.

IV

DEISANOCTA walked to the visaradio, clicked it on. This time she switched in the view screen also. Her white hands spun dials, and she began to speak in Martian, calmly, insistently.

The view screen took on depth and color. She adjusted condensing levers and it divided into a dozen smaller squares. Slowly each square filled, until the faces of a dozen Martian men looked out at her—silent, waiting faces, behind each of which the white mist formed a backdrop.

Deisanocta's red lips twitched, and her lovely eyes leaped into sudden flame. For a moment, she was silent. Barry could feel tension building up in the room, and see it in the faces of those who looked out of the screen.

Then the Princess spoke a single short sentence in her own tongue. Barry Williams did not need an interpretation. The meaning of the command was clear in its ringing syllables; "Strike for Mars!"

Twenty-four eyes blazed from the screen—the eyes of twelve field commanders flashing hatred of their oppressors and fierce exultation that the hour of revenge was here! From each throat rose the same word, spoken in awe, reverence, resolution. "Deisanocta!"

Thus they saluted their leader, the Mother of Mist, Queen-to-be of Mars! Then the screen was blank.

"In short minutes Mars will belong again to its people, Barry Williams," said the girl softly. "We wait here for the report of my commanders."

She sank to a sitting position on the red sand, arranging the silver mesh of her dress about her slim body. Barry did likewise, as did the Martian.

Minutes dragged by. The radio screen glowed softly, but remained blank. Barry felt the muscles gather in his arms and shoulders. This idle waiting was hard to bear. If he could only be in there fighting—

Deisanocta was finding it difficult to wait, too. The eager glow of anticipation had died away in her beautiful eyes. They were reflective, reminiscent.

"All my life I've been trained for this moment," she said, at last. "Deep in the Crypt, burial ground of our race, the Elders hid and taught me."

"In the Crypt!" exclaimed Barry. "Then the dying Martian knew of you when he threatened 'Justice from the Crypt'!"

"Hardly," she smiled. "That was twenty years before I was born—ten years after the first Earthmen came to Mars.

"He couldn't even have known that my parents were hidden there. They were still young, the last of Martian royalty, hidden away by a few faithful servants."

"What did he mean then?"

She shook her head, the black tresses gleaming faintly under the mist. "We never knew."

"Tell me about this Crypt," Barry asked. "And tell me more about your people."

"The Crypt is our ancient burial place. It is underground, dry, and our dead are safe there from animals that would find bodies the shifting sand would not protect.

"Always, we laid our dead to rest there, until Craig Grey placed guards at the doors and forbade the practice."

"He was afraid some weapon was hidden there," reasoned Barry Williams. "It's the only thing the dying Martian's threat could mean."

"What weapon could be there?" Deisanocta asked mournfully. "Our people were always peaceful. They lived beside the wells, growing the food they ate. It took Earthmen to teach them to hate and kill—to know that ore dust was worth blood!"

"Does your written history give no clue of a time when the Crypt was anything but a burial place?"

"Our people knew nothing of writing. That, too, we learned from Earthmen, my Elders learned it in secret and taught me."

"And they developed the white mist there in the Crypt, and brought the old Earthman who taught you hypnotism?" Barry asked. He pictured her frightened childhood among the dead, in the darkness so close to Craig's guards who would have killed her on sight.

THE GIRL read his expression. "It was not so terrible," she said wistfully. "There was peace, we were not tortured for ore dust, or made to slave in mines. It is light there, even deep down; for the walls are radioactive.

"But my parents died of hearts broken by the suffering of their people. It was later that the white mist was developed, and I learned that my mission was to use it!"

A faint noise broke into their conversation—a clicking that was suddenly almost thunderous in their ears as every other

sound died!" It was the radio receptor signal.

In the screen, the twelve squares were filling again. The time for reports had come—and there had been no special report of victory.

Silence held, while the twelve faces grew into sharp focus. Barry noted that at least three of the men had not been among the twelve who last faced their Princess. The faces of the rest were dirty, tired, depressed. A couple were bandaged. Before a word was spoken, Barry Williams knew that the news would be bad, and premonition turned his stomach into a leaden ball.

In the screen, the twelve tired faces were silent, waiting. They were wooden, unmoving, until Deisanocta spoke, calmly, questioningly.

One after another, came the reports. Each was brief, and although Barry could not understand the Martian words, he knew that he had been right. The news was bad.

Deisanocta's face paled as she listened. Deep in her eyes raged a conflict of emotions, dismay, sorrow, anger. When the last report was heard, she spoke again.

There was no hesitation in the throaty accents. Words followed each other in a torrent that slowly swept away the numbness from the twelve faces before her! When she had finished, her commanders were again eager, their eyes flashing, exulting.

"Deisanocta! Deisanocta!" came their chant, a promise of victory. Again they faded from the screen to carry out her orders.

When the girl turned from the screen, some of the confidence had slipped from her. Her dark head was bowed, and her slim figure had lost some of its proud erectness.

"Grey's men were waiting for the attack," she told Barry. "They wore space suits!

"We waited too long—until he discovered how to protect his men from the mist. Many of my followers have died in battle. We have not won a single objective!"

"I am sincerely sorry," he said slowly. "Sorry that some of your people have died; sorry that you have failed."

Her head snapped up, color flooding the pale cheeks. "We have not lost! The

mist that covers Mars will remain. My men have surrounded the enemy. They will harass his every move.

"Let Grey wait for another attack—wait until his oxygen tanks are empty, and his space suits useless! Then the mist will triumph!"

BARRY WILLIAMS shook his head sadly. "Can the mist reach up to the end of atmosphere," he asked, "where their ships can go to compress clear air? And, if so, can the mist reach across space to Earth, from where Grey's freighters can bring compressed air?"

"I wonder if I read your mind rightly," Deisanocta said scornfully. "I wonder if you are the friend of Mars I thought you."

He crossed to her in two quick steps. His hands gripped her elbows, drawing her up to face the intensity of his eyes. "Yes, I am a friend of Mars! That's why I'm here—that's why Grey and his men hunt me as they do you!"

She shook herself free. The flush of anger in her cheeks had deepened into a flaming crimson. Her eyes avoided him. "Then do not try to discourage me, Barry Williams. The mist will remain."

He was silent, the plan he'd been about to suggest unspoken. If he was distrusted, this was no time to propose it.

Overhead, they heard the thrumming of rockets. Barry smiled mirthlessly. "Grey has his scouts out."

"They will see nothing in the mist," Deisanocta said confidently. But she turned to the radio and contacted her field captains. "It is the same everywhere," she told him. "The enemy's ships circle helplessly overhead."

"I don't like it," Barry said. "If I know Craig Grey, he's up to something. Those ships aren't up there without a reason."

Deisanocta ignored this, her eyes speaking plainly her disappointment in the Earthman she'd believed a friend. Instead of answering him, she turned to the Martian who had waited so patiently and silently for her orders.

"We will eat," she said haughtily to Barry, after a few swift words to the other. "Perhaps Earth food will revive your courage."

"Thank you." Barry ignored the slur,

and sat down beside her where the Martian was spreading a cloth on the ground.

The thrumming of rockets died away as they began, and the Princess glanced significantly at Barry Williams. He turned to the food in silence, a frown of concentration on his forehead.

They had dried horse meat from Earth, the staple dish of the natives, a poor grade of canned corn that was like a thin mush, and hard, wafer-thin pieces of bread.

"My courageous followers won these provisions in battle," Deisanocta said softly.

Barry was finding even the unappetizing menu inviting. He ate rapidly, being careful not to work too deeply into what he knew was a slender store of food. The girl watched him as she nibbled at her food. The scorn in her face slowly faded into sad reproach.

It wasn't until the Princess poured a glass of liquid and set it before Barry, that the far-away look was swept from his eyes by sudden understanding. The liquid was Martian Wrin, a delicious, invigorating drink from native roots, much coveted and seldom obtained by Terrestrials. Even through the white mist that shrouded them, it sparkled from ruby depths. The color galvanized Barry Williams.

"RED!" he exclaimed. "*Infra-red!* Grey's ships were sweeping the desert with infra-red rays, and taking photographs with film sensitive only to those rays. When those prints are developed, he'll have the location of every mist-producing unit that's on Mars, and of your followers!"

"I don't understand," stammered the bewildered Deisanocta. "I know nothing of these things."

"Just believe me," he pleaded. "Order your men and the mist units to move at once!"

Deisanocta moved to the radio and obeyed. Barry Williams' heart leaped. She believed in him, her recent doubt forgotten before the vigor of his arguments.

"And us?" she asked.

"We're all right, being underground. The infra-red rays won't betray us in the photographs. Listen!"

They heard the sound of rocket jets overhead, and it was magnified, built into

thunder in their ears. The radio was still tuned to the field command radios, and they brought the sound of Grey's rocket ships from every corner of the planet.

Before their eyes, the white mist swirled, and on the view screen were twelve small squares of silver. Suddenly, almost simultaneously, lurid streaks cut across those squares—flaming heat rays, softened into orange by the seething vapor!

Deisanocta gasped. "You were right, Barry Williams! Had my forces not moved, they would have been destroyed.

"But it is Grey who has failed this time!"

Barry faced her slowly. His blue eyes rested on her lovely face, and the words he spoke caught in his throat.

"Grey will wait a short while for the mist to dissipate," he said. "When it does not, he'll go back to the pictures. About every spot where a unit or force was shown, he'll draw a circle. The radius of that circle will be the distance a man can travel on foot from the time the photograph was taken, until the time the ships return a second time.

"Then, one by one, he'll ray the entire area of those circles—concentrating as many ships as necessary for the job."

Deisanocta came very close to him. The pleading in the depths of her eyes shook Barry Williams. Without realizing it, he put out his hands and again grasped her elbows.

This time she did not draw away. She moved closer, until her lips almost brushed his as she spoke. He could feel her slim figure tremble, not with fear, but with struggling to repress the tears that were welling into her grey orbs, the sobs that were fighting her breath!

"Then this is defeat?" she whispered. "My loyal followers wiped out—the mist, our weapon, swept from the planet?"

"The only alternative," he said with sudden fierce tenderness, "is to order the units turned off and buried in the sand. Tell your men to split into small bands and hide in the desert. Their camouflage will protect them from Grey's scouts.

"That way, Grey will think he's won, and your forces will be intact for the future."

Deisanocta's small hand found his and held it as she issued the necessary orders.

WHEN the screen was again blank, Barry Williams spun the dials.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Tuning in Earth on the regular broadcast channels."

"Earth! At this time, Barry Williams, you would listen to Earth broadcasts!"

He turned to her reproachfully. "Don't you trust me yet? I must know how my government is reacting to the situation here; for, if you follow my advice, you and I will be putting the case of the Martians before that government. I still think we have a chance of convincing them. But we'll need to find a spaceship, and take it."

"You are right, Barry Williams," Deisanocta admitted sadly. "You were right in the beginning, and my efforts have only brought failure."

"My heart trusted you—believed in you; and because it was my heart, I mistrusted. I followed my reason instead—and no woman should do that."

"I'm following my heart—have from the beginning," Barry murmured. "And it tells me we haven't lost yet." His hands left her elbows, went about her waist. Behind them, the Martian turned away.

"*Revolt of Martian savages,*" broke in a voice from the radio. They froze, listening to the words that followed; "*Craig Grey, President of rey Enterprises, Incorporated, is present in person at the scene of trouble, directing the heroic resistance of Terrestrial pioneers. He has been authorized by World Government to capture Barry Williams, investigator of the dastardly campaign, dead or alive.*"

"*Williams disappeared into the desert, and the abortive attack by the savages followed immediately. 'Justice in the Crypt', is said to be the wild battle shout of the Martians. Federal troops have embarked for Mars. It is—*"

Barry snapped off the radio. "Grey has pulled off another one!" Deisanocta clung to his hand mutely, her white face revealing the despair the news had brought.

Barry's mouth was a straight, hard line. His eyes flamed, and muscles bunched in his shoulders. After a moment's silence, he turned the radio back on.

"More orders for you, Deisanocta. Get in touch with your men. We want about half a dozen of the best, and tell them to

bring along the oldest Martian they can find!"

"But what—why?"

"If it's 'Justice from the Crypt' they want, we'll give it to them. We're going to find out what's there, and use it!"

"Have your men meet us near one entrance to the place. Tell them to bring a portable visa-radio, so we can call the rest if we need them. This is the only chance we've got left!"

V

OVER the red sands of Mars, the silver mist of vengeance was slowly thinning. The two moons sent their light probing down, breaking through here and there to find and bathe the sand.

Where those rays found the little party that crept cautiously toward the Crypt, it did not betray them under the red camouflage blankets. They moved silently ahead, invisible, determined.

"We are there," Deisanocta whispered at last to Barry Williams, beside her under the cloak. "We must rise and go on foot the rest of the way."

"O.K." he said. He scoured the sky, his sharp blue eyes trying to pierce the mist. "If any ships come over, they won't spot us. The mist is thick here."

"The trick will be to get by the guard at the entrance. We don't want to have to overcome him and risk an alarm."

Deisanocta was speaking to the Martians. They rose with Barry and the Princess, and the little party stayed close together to avoid being separated in the white shroud about them.

A suggestion from Barry, and they formed into single file and moved forward. A sharp-eyed Martian was in the lead.

"We are fortunate," the Princess said. "The guard is away from his post."

"Hurry," ordered Barry. "Inside! If we meet him after we're in, that's too bad for him."

Silently as the whiteness about them, the party filed into the Crypt. It was colder here, for the tunnel sloped sharply downward, and the air was heavier. They had gone only a few steps before the last wisps of the mist disappeared. The heavier air had held it out of the Crypt.

About them, the walls shone with a faint radiance.

"Now!" Barry turned to the girl. The party had been under his command from the beginning. Even the Martians had at last recognized that this Earthman was a leader.

"Hypnotize the old Martian. With a willing subject, you can produce a deep hypnosis. Command him to think of the Crypt, remember every thing he ever heard about it, or saw in it, from the time he was an infant!"

Deisanocta's eyes bored into the rapt, obedient face of the old Martian. She murmured softly, sleepily in their tongue. The other's face slowly smoothed, his eyes going blank.

Her words became sharp, commanding, insistent. Under their leashing, the old one's brow furrowed. He was remembering, digging deep into forgotten recesses of his mind. At last Deisanocta spoke to Barry.

"I see the Crypt seventy years ago. This one was here as an infant in his father's arms.

"It was different. There are fewer bodies. Their clothes are strange. None bear the wounds of battle."

"Remember what we're looking for," snapped Barry.

"I am deep down in the Crypt," came the girl's voice, weaker. "Deeper than even I have ever been. I do not know the part. There is something here, something big—I cannot make it out. It is very faint in this one's mind."

"Tell him to lead us to it," said Barry. "That will save your strength."

Seconds later they were following the old Martian through a labyrinth of tunnels. He moved rapidly, unhesitatingly, his face wooden and intent. Deisanocta was beside Barry, her hand in his.

"Can it be?" she questioned. "Is the answer as simple as this?"

"I hope so," he told her. "It is something you wouldn't have thought of, because you did not remember all you were taught about hypnotism. And no one else could have done it against the old one's will."

"Look!" Deisanocta cried suddenly. "He has lost his way."

"Impossible," Barry said.

But the old Martian was leading them toward a blank wall. Still he did not hesitate. With steps rapid, certain, he marched directly into the wall. His head struck, and he fell, rolling to their feet.

BARRY bent over him quickly, then rose one hand digging at the wall. "It's soft dirt," he explained. "Didn't hurt him. He's only stunned." He stepped back to Deisanocta.

"That's why Grey did not find whatever is here. It's somewhere behind that wall—cut off by an earth slide!"

"But—what is there?"

"We'll soon find out." Barry's hand dug at the wall, scooping away the soft dirt. "Tell the boys to start digging. But post a couple up the tunnel in both directions, so we won't be surprised."

Four Martians and Barry Williams dug at the wall with cupped hands. It was hot, dirty work in the heavy air of the Crypt. Sweat beaded their faces. Arms ached after the first few minutes.

Barry did not slacken his pace, and the others stayed with him. At last, the Earthman gave a cry of triumph.

"It isn't thick! See, the dirt is crumbling away from us now—falling on the other side." The vigor of their attack redoubled.

Hearing the cries, the Martians posted down the tunnel came running to help. Deisanocta stepped closer, her face radiant. Barry threw her a glance, and his heart noted the way her black hair threw back highlights of the walls' radiance.

His hand shot out again at the wall, viciously, and the last grains of dirt fell inward. Light showed through. Beside him, the others worked frantically. In seconds, the opening was large enough for one of them to pass through.

"Deisanocta," Barry Williams gasped. "Go in. I'll be right behind you."

The rest crowded behind, and all but the unconscious old Martian were soon on the other side. They stared open-mouthed, incredulously at the sight that met them.

It was a great room into which they'd made their way, the walls luminous, and stretching off almost out of view. There were no dead here. Except for one object, the vast chamber was empty.

That object itself was big, black, rear-

ing upward above them halfway to the distant roof.

"A spaceship!" cried Deisanocta.

"The great-grandfather of all space ships," added Barry.

"Look at the size of it, the diameter of those rocket tubes! Used a poor fuel, inefficiently. But they made it. Crashed through the roof of this place. Look at the dark patch overhead, where sand filled in a gap."

"'Justice from the Crypt,'" murmured the girl. "I think I—"

"So do I," rapped Barry. "Come on, you and I are going inside. Tell the others to guard this opening!"

Hand-in-hand, the two of them passed through a yawning port. Beneath their feet, the ramp was solid. Metal did not corrode, in this dry atmosphere. The old ship had not deteriorated in its years here.

Barry Williams and the girl passed down a long passage, unlit except for the faint radioactive radiance that make its way in through smaller portholes. They came to a door, which would not yield to Barry's efforts.

"Locked," he said. "We can't stop for that." His heat ray came out. The beam played against the lock until the metal glowed and ran. Barry kicked at the bottom of the door where the metal was cooler. It swung inward.

"It's the control room," Barry said as their eyes slowly adjusted themselves to the even dimmer light of the room.

Barry's hand groped against the wall beside the door. There was a click, and a yellow radiance sprang from the ceiling. "Even the batteries are still good," he muttered.

"What is this?" Deisanocta cried with a shudder.

THE ROOM was a maze of instruments, levers, panels about the sides. But it wasn't this that had shocked the Princess, it was the bodies.

Two sprawled on the floor, one on its back still held a weapon in one hand. That weapon pointed to the third body.

Slumped in a chair before an instrument panel, the third body had grown rigid, a look of amazement on the undecomposed face. In the right hand, the weapon that

had undoubtedly killed the other two, was still poised.

"You can almost see the smoke curling from the muzzle of that ancient automatic," said Barry grimly. "They fought it out—must have been after the one in the chair landed the ship—and everybody lost!"

"It's—it's horrible," the girl murmured. "Why—"

A sudden commotion, reaching their ears faintly from outside, cut off her question. There were shouts—cries of pain and rage. Running feet pounded up the ship's ramp, came down the passage toward them.

Barry brought up the heat ray in his hand—lowered it as a Martian staggered into the room. He was burned across the face and body.

His pale lips moved. Faint words came forth. Others were choked off as he slumped to the floor. His body sprawled beside the other two already there.

"He says a god comes," Deisanocta explained wildly. "One they cannot harm. The rest of my followers in the room outside have fallen."

Other footsteps sounded at the door. Barry's heat ray came up again. This time its beam sprang across the room, bathed the figure that came through the door with blazing heat.

"No good, Williams," came a sneering voice, metallic through a space suit communicator. "Don't you know impervium when you see it?"

"Yes, I know it," said Barry. His eyes had noted the thin, fragile-looking garment over the space suit that Craig Grey wore. Impervium, fabulous, incredibly expensive, proof against any heat ray. "There's about a dozen suits in the System, and you have to have one!"

Craig Grey's little black eyes snapped with triumph. "A man who fights savages needs one, Williams," he mocked. His glance flickered to Deisanocta, lingered a long minute. "I see now why you went over to the Martians."

Barry took a step toward him, fingers itching. "You—"

Grey brought up his heat ray. "Careful, Williams. You have little enough time to live as it is."

Barry stopped, bafflement stamped on his face. A rash move would leave Deisa-

nocta at the mercy of this man. Craig Grey laughed.

"I figured you could solve the mystery about this place, that's why I told my guards to let you past. I knew you'd come here instead of trying to run to Earth—after I told them of your activities on Mars."

"Grey, you can't get away with this," gritted Barry. He took another step—not toward Grey, but in the direction of Deisanocta.

"Stand still!" snapped the ore king. The weapon in his hand was very steady. "I want to look around."

HIS glittering eyes roamed about the control room. "So this is the secret weapon of the Crypt! I knew it'd be something my boys would be better off not seeing—no chance of a leak this way."

"Earth troops will find it," Barry threatened.

"An atomic bomb will take care of that," the ore-king countered smoothly. "You won't be around to tell them about it, and neither will the girl. I'll keep the secret myself."

Keeping his weapon trained on the two, Grey prowled about the room.

"Here's the ship's log," he thumbed through rapidly, not relaxing his vigilance for an instant. "Hmm. Left Earth in 2085—during the last Continental War. Two scientists, a rich backer—" His hand swept to the body in the chair. "That would be him—rich backers are often seeking power."

"Ship-full of refugees from all lands—average people. Going to establish a Utopian world on Mars." He snapped the book shut.

"Ancestors of your savages, Grey," said Barry quietly.

"Yes," replied the ore-king. "Brains killed each other off in a locked control room—probably the keys to the ship's stores are locked in here with them. That left the others on their own—no sciences, no arts! They just farmed."

"What a clincher you almost had, Williams!"

His heat ray came up, levelled. Barry shuffled another half-step. Craig Grey laughed harshly, his little black eyes sweeping over them.

"I'm a crack shot, Williams. You

can't rush me. But, just to be sure, you'll go first."

The flaming beam of his heat ray cut across the room—and Barry leaped at the same instant. Pain lanced through his left shoulder. But he was not leaping toward Craig Grey—Barry was plunging toward the floor. There was a body there, and he smashed into it—a body with an ancient weapon still clutched in a right, long-dead hand.

Craig Grey backed away a step, the ray beam sweeping a fiery arch toward the other. A sharp report thundered in the room bouncing in a dozen echoes and re-echoes from the metal walls. Smoke curled from the muzzle of the old automatic in Barry's fingers, and bitter acrid smell was in his nostrils. Long years in the dry atmosphere of the Crypt had brought no corrosion, no deterioration to the weapon!

Again Grey backed away, a curse ripping through his thin lips, suddenly clenched with pain. His right arm dangled uselessly, the ray gun dropping from nerveless fingers.

Barry Williams came to his feet, the searing pain in his right shoulder forgotten momentarily in his triumph. "Impervium was made to stop heat rays, Grey. But an old automatic waited here hundreds of years to bring justice to Mars!"

He turned to Deisanocta. Her face was radiant, but the grey depths of her lovely eyes clouded as they fixed on his seared shoulder. "Barry—"

"Never mind me," he ordered brusquely. "Get to that radio we brought. Tell your men to let loose the mist again and attack at once!"

Craig Grey's pain-twisted face went paler. "The mist! You can't—I destroyed—"

"That's what you were supposed to think, Grey," Barry snapped. "But you'll see that silver lining shining through the cloud you brought to Mars. Then we'll put the mist drug and Deisanocta's hypnotism to work on your rotten mind. We'll get enough details on your fraud to convince any government!"

"Now come on, get outside! Your men'll fall like sheep without leadership. I'll have the Princess speed things up by offer-

ing amnesty to those that surrender without resistance."

Craig Grey went slowly through the passage, down the ramp of the old spaceship.

TWELVE MILES above the surface of the red planet Mars, hovered the fleet of Earth transports. The Federal troops who'd made the trip from Earth were never to land. For Mars was a free planet, and Earth Government had commanded its forces to respect the sovereignty of Deisanocta, Queen of Mars.

From below, a steady stream of smaller ships was flowing up to the transports, and back downward for another load.

"Can't figure it out," said a puzzled soldier. "We came to fight Martians—maybe take some Martian prisoners; and we're going home loaded with Earthmen who are prisoners."

"There aren't any Martians," explained his irate Sergeant, "They're really Earthmen. And these prisoners have been treating them like Martians—or—or—"

"Never mind!" ordered his superior. "Anyway the ether between here and Earth's been burning. Faces—pictures of

documents, a confession, and all sorts of stuff have been radiographed to the old home planet. And we've got our orders."

The Sergeant was on firmer ground now. "Here comes the guy I wouldn't want to be—Craig Grey! After the stuff he's admitted, three times his money wouldn't keep him from the gas chambers!"

As the last of the Earth ships blasted homeward, Deisanocta, Queen of Mars, turned to Barry Williams, acting Terrestrial Ambassador. Affairs of Government weighed heavily on her, and Barry's training had been of invaluable help.

She fixed her tired eyes on him, and they glowed softly as she spoke. "And what will you do, Barry Williams, after the Permanent Ambassador has been appointed and sent here?"

His blue eyes met her gaze. "Read my mind, Deisanocta. This time my will is not opposed to it. The answer is there."

She came closer. "I will not use science to find that answer, Barry. It is in your eyes and on your lips, but you must speak.

"There are some things a woman, even a Queen, wants to learn only from the lips of the man she loves."
