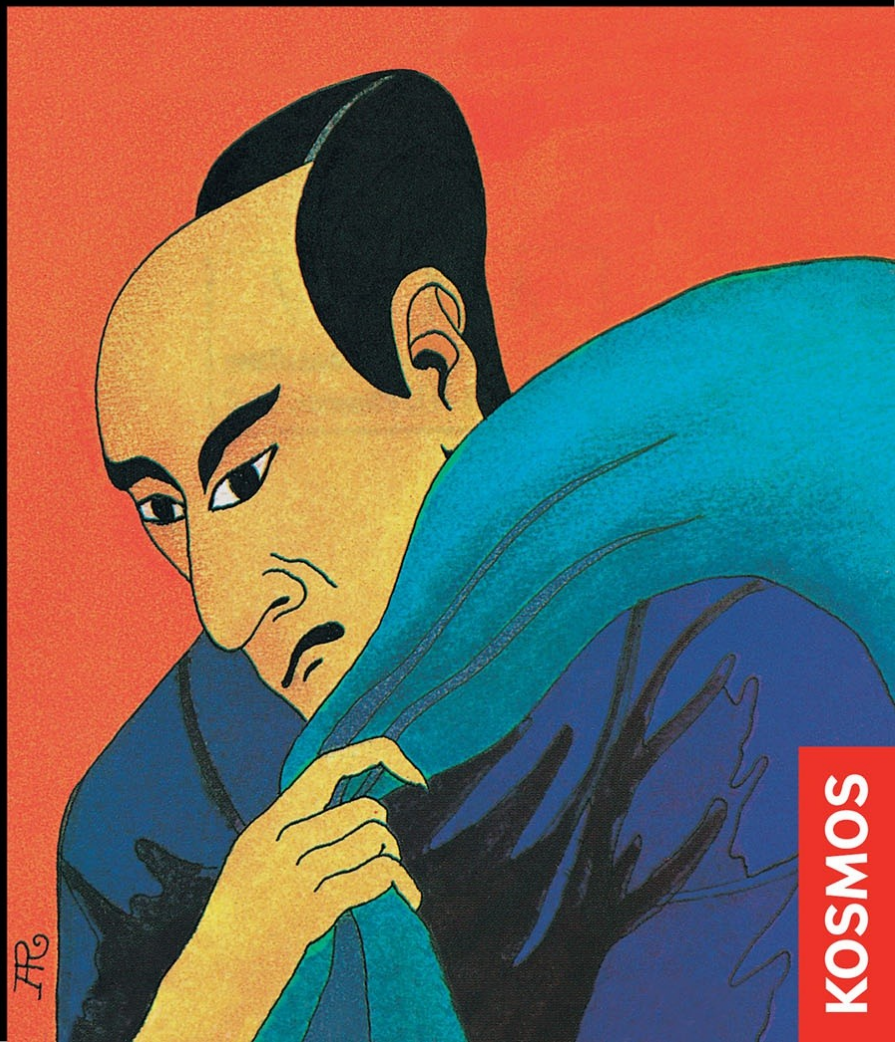


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Die drei ???[®]

The Mystery of the Vanishing Treasure



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???[®]**

Albert Hitfield and The Three Investigators in The Mystery of the Vanishing Treasure

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Kosmos

Umschlagillustration von Aiga Rasch (9. Juli 1941–24. Dezember 2009)
Umschlaggestaltung: eStudio Calamar, Girona, auf der Grundlage der
Gestaltung von Aiga Rasch, Leinfelden-Echterdingen
Grundlayout: DOPPELPUNKT, Stuttgart

Titel der Originalausgabe:

“Alfred Hitchcock and The Three Investigators in The Mystery of the
Vanishing Treasure”

© 1966, by Random House, Inc., New York

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Mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Universität Michigan

ISBN 978-3-440-14780-1

eBook-Konvertierung: le-tex publishing services GmbH, Leipzig

Don't Read This!

(Unless you've never met The Three Investigators before)

This volume is another case of my young friends, Jupiter Jones, Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews, who call themselves The Three Investigators. In it they become involved in a baffling museum robbery, assist a lady troubled by a bad case of gnomes, find themselves on the way to the Middle East to become slaves, and otherwise engage in adventurous exploits that make my hair stand on end.

If you have read any of their previous cases, of course you know all about them. You know that First Investigator Jupiter Jones is stocky, almost fat; that Pete Crenshaw is tall and muscular; that Bob Andrews is slighter and more studious. You know that Headquarters for their firm is a carefully hidden, mobile home trailer in the super-junkyard called The Jones Salvage Yard, owned by Jupiter's aunt and uncle with whom he lives.

You know that Headquarters is entered by certain secret entrances and exits known only to the boys, and bearing such code names as Tunnel Two, Easy Three, Green Gate One and Red Gate Rover.

You know they live in Rocky Beach, California, a town on the shores of the Pacific, a few miles from that strange and glamorous place, Hollywood. In fact, you know all you need to know, and therefore you have skipped all this. If it happens that you haven't previously met the boys, let the foregoing words be an introduction to them.

And now, forward! The case begins!

Albert Hitfield

To Steal the Rainbow Jewels

"I wonder," said Jupiter Jones, "if we could steal the Rainbow Jewels."

His question took his two companions by surprise. Pete Crenshaw almost dropped a soldering iron, and Bob Andrews did drop the composing stick he was using to set type on their old printing press.

"What did you say?" he demanded, looking in dismay at the spilled type.

"I said I wonder if we could steal the Rainbow Jewels," Jupiter repeated, "if we were thieves, that is."

"Which we are not," said Pete firmly. "Stealing jewels is dangerous. People shoot at you and chase you. Anyway, I believe in that old stuff about honesty being the best policy."

"Agreed," said Jupiter. But he continued to stare thoughtfully at the newspaper he had been reading.

The three boys, who called themselves The Three Investigators, were in Jupiter's secluded workshop section of The Jones Salvage Yard. Here, out of doors but under a six-foot roof that extended from the Salvage Yard's tall fence, they worked on rebuilding junk that came into the yard. The part of the profits they received from Jupiter's Uncle Titus kept them in pocket money and helped them pay for such luxuries as a telephone in their hidden Headquarters.

It had been quiet around the Salvage Yard for the last few days. The Three Investigators had had nothing to investigate, not even a missing pet. So the boys had nothing more on their minds than fixing the small antique radio Pete had found in the yard's latest batch of junk.

At least Bob and Pete didn't. Jupiter preferred to keep his

mind, rather than his hands, working. When he didn't have a good problem to think about, there was no telling what he would come up with on his own.

Bob looked up from the type case. "I'll bet you're talking about the jewels in the Peterson Museum," he said, remembering the newspaper story his family had been discussing the night before.

"Peterson Museum?" Pete looked blank. "Where's that?"

"On top of a hill in Hollywood," Bob told him. "A great big old house that used to be owned by Mr. Hiram Peterson, the oil millionaire. He left the house as a museum, open to the public."

"And right now it has on exhibition a special display of fabulous jewels," Jupiter said, "sponsored by the Nagasami Jewelry Company of Japan. It is touring around the United States as a means of getting publicity for its cultured pearls. Many of the items on exhibit are pearls or made from pearls.

"However, two other items are of special interest. The main attraction is the Rainbow Jewels. It is a group of gems – diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and stones of other colors – so arranged that they shimmer with all the colors of the rainbow. Some are very large, and even one of them would be worth thousands of dollars. Altogether, they are worth millions."

"There's also a belt," Bob chimed in. "Something made out of huge gold links and set with square emeralds. The paper said it weighs fifteen pounds. It once belonged to the ancient emperors of Japan."

"You're crazy, Jupe," Pete said. "No one could steal jewels like those. I bet they're guarded like a bank."

"Slightly better than most banks," Jupiter said. "There are several guards always in the room with the jewels. A closed-

circuit television set trained on the Rainbow Jewels is watched at all times from the main office. At night the room is crisscrossed by beams of invisible light. If anybody broke a beam, it would set off a loud alarm.

"In addition, the glass in the cases has fine wires set into it, which also work the alarm system. If the glass is broken, the alarm goes off. It has its own special electric system so even if a big storm, for instance, knocked out all power, the alarm would still work."

"Nobody could steal those jewels!" Pete said positively.

"But it does offer a challenge, doesn't it?" Jupiter asked.

"Why is it a challenge?" Bob asked. "We solve crimes, we don't figure out how to commit them."

"But we haven't any to solve right now," Jupiter pointed out.

"I was hoping Albert Hitfield would write us about some interesting problem. But he hasn't, and an investigator should use his time profitably. If we try to figure out whether or not the Nagasami jewels *could* be stolen, we will be gaining valuable experience for solving future jewel robberies. And we'll be getting the criminal's viewpoint."

"We'll be wasting our time," Pete said. "We'd be a lot better off to go take some more skin-diving and scuba lessons. We still have a lot to learn about handling the diving gear."

"I vote with Pete," Bob declared. "Let's practice our diving. As soon as we're good at it, Dad has promised us a camping trip in lower California, where we can catch live lobsters in the rocks."

"That's two to one, Juve," Pete pointed out. "You're outvoted."

"The newspaper says," Jupiter answered, as if he hadn't heard them, "that this is Children's Day at the museum. All children under eighteen get in at half price, and all scouts in

uniform and their leaders will be admitted free. That means any Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts or Brownies.”

“We haven’t any uniforms,” Pete said. “That lets us out.”

“But we have earned some extra money from helping Uncle Titus all week,” Jupiter reminded him. “Also, I have time off coming to me. It is an ideal opportunity to go over to Hollywood and inspect the Rainbow Jewels in the Peterson Museum. At least we should see what real jewels look like. Someday we may be called upon to recover some.”

“I have a feeling,” Bob muttered to Pete, “that we’re going to be outvoted, one to two.”

“Hey, I have an idea!” Pete had suddenly become interested.

“I know how a robbery could be worked. Jewels are stones, aren’t they? Well, what do you do with stones?”

“Study them under a microscope,” Jupiter said.

“Throw them at tin cans,” Bob answered.

“Sure,” Pete agreed. “But there’s something else you can do if they aren’t too big. You shoot them from slingshots.

“So that’s how the jewels could be stolen. Someone breaks the glass case that holds the Rainbow Jewels. He takes out a slingshot, shoots the gems through the open window, and his accomplices catch them in baskets. Then they make a fast getaway.”

“Great!” Bob said.

Jupiter looked thoughtful. Then, slowly, he shook his head.

“There are two weaknesses in the scheme,” he said. “First, the accomplices might get away with some of the jewels, but the other thief would certainly be captured by the guards. And,” he went on, “there is an even greater weakness. The jewels could not be sent by slingshot through a window of the museum because –”

He paused, dramatically.

“Well, why?” Pete asked impatiently.

“Yes, why?” Bob chimed in. “It seems like a good idea to me.”

“Because,” Jupiter told them, “the Peterson Museum doesn’t have any windows.”

Excitement at the Museum

An hour later, Bob, Pete and Jupiter arrived at the foot of the little hill on which stood the Peterson Museum. The hill was across the street from Griffith Park, where the boys had often gone on picnics. Several acres of green grass sloped up to an immense stucco house with two wings, each having a domed roof. A winding two-lane road led to the rear of the house, and another came down farther off for an exit.

Cars and station wagons were moving slowly up the entrance drive. The three boys hiked up, keeping well out of the way of traffic. They saw that the parking lot was liberally sprinkled with cars. More were arriving, and more people getting out all the time. Most of the crowd were children, many in scout uniforms.

Dozens of little Cub Scouts, in blue uniforms with gold neckerchiefs, ran around wildly while their Den Mothers tried to calm them down. Troops of Girl Scouts, looking very lady-like, watched them disapprovingly. There were a good many little Brownies and a few tall Boy Scouts carrying knapsacks, each with a hatchet fastened to his belt.

"I want to study the layout of the land," Jupiter told them. "First we'll examine the outside of the museum."

They walked slowly past the rear of the big building. Bob noticed that what Jupe had said about windows was true. There had once been windows in the building, but those on the ground floor and in the domed wings had been filled in. He was staring so hard at the building that he failed to notice a group of small Cub Scouts and their Den Mother. "Oops! Sorry," he said, bumping into one of them and sending him sprawling in the grass. The boy scrambled to his feet, a gold

tooth gleaming in a sunny smile, and ran to catch up with his troop.

"Oh oh!" Jupiter said. "Look at that!"

"Look at what?" Pete said, "I don't see anything but the back of the building."

"Look at those wires," Jupiter said. "See? All the electric light wires come from a pole down to that corner and go inside the house in a cable. That could easily be cut."

"Who would want to cut it?" Bob asked.

"Burglars," Jupiter said. "Of course that wouldn't affect the alarm system, which we know is separate. However, it is a weakness."

Now they finished circling the building and approached the front entrance. As they were not in uniform, they each paid twenty-five cents admission.

Inside, a guard directed them to the right. "Follow the arrows, please," he said.

The three went down a hall and found themselves in the right wing, in a big room with a domed ceiling at least three stories high. There was a balcony around one half of the room, and on it was a sign: "Closed."

Many large pictures in ornate carved frames decorated the walls. These were part of the permanent museum exhibition. However, The Three Investigators were not much interested in the pictures. They had come to see the jewels.

"Notice how the pictures are hung," Jupiter said, as they walked slowly past the paintings. "Each one has an invisible support holding it to the wall. In the old days people hung pictures on long wires from moldings near the ceiling. You can still see the wide moldings which they used when this was Mr. Peterson's house."

Pete looked, but he was more interested in the way the tall

windows had been blocked out.

"Why'd they get rid of the windows?" he asked. "You're right, nobody could shoot any jewels out of this place, but I can't figure out why they did away with the windows."

"Partly," Jupiter said, "to give more wall surface to hang pictures on. But mostly, I expect, so they could install good air conditioning. Notice how cool it is? Keeping the temperature and moisture always the same helps preserve the valuable pictures."

Slowly they circled the room, then went down a back hallway following a crowd of giggling, pushing youngsters. They came out in the left wing of the museum, where the jewels were on exhibit. Like the other room, it had a balcony running around half of it, but the steps were roped off.

The Rainbow Jewels were in the exact center of the room. A velvet rope prevented anyone from getting close enough to touch the glass case.

"Very good precautions," Jupiter said, as they filed past. "It prevents any thief from smashing the case and running."

They lingered as long as they could, staring at an enormous diamond that flashed blue fire, a glowing emerald, a ruby that burned like a red ember, and a huge shiny pearl. These were the most valuable jewels, but there were others, of all colors of the rainbow, arranged around them and sparkling in the light.

A guard at the corner of the case told them the jewels were valued at two million dollars, and asked them to move on. A giggling bunch of Girl Scouts took their place.

The boys now found themselves in front of a case nearer the wall, just beneath the balcony, where an impressive jeweled belt was displayed. It was more than three feet long and made of great gold links set with enormous, square emeralds. Pearls