

The Golden Amazon Returns By THORNTON
AYRE

fantastic

ADVENTURES

JANUARY
20c



RICHARD O.
LEWIS
★
EDMOND
HAMILTON
★
ROSS
ROCKLYNNE
★
WILLIAM P.
McGIVERN

The
**FLOATING
ROBOT**

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

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The
Golden Amazon Returns

By
John Russell Fearn
Writing under the pseudonym Thorton Ayre.

First published *Fantastic Adventures*, January 1941.

This story was also published under the title *The Deathless Amazon*.

This is one of four *Golden Amazon* stories which were collected, turned into a novel, and reprinted in *Toronto Star Weekly*.

The best weapons against the Amazon were her own children, reasoned Welgand, so he kidnaped them—and led her into a trap!

CHAPTER I

“Four years,” mused Chris Wilson. “Four years of comparative peace and quiet. It’s almost unbelievable.”

He stretched out his lithe body more comfortably in the soft, flaming verdure that formed the entire makeup of this part of the Hotlands of Venus. Lazily his gaze traveled over the quiet clearing, past the cumbersome but friendly monstrosities of the Hotlanders browsing in the heat; then finally to his young goddess of a wife—the former Violet Ray—stretched beside him.

“Yes, four years,” she agreed. “I’ve nearly forgotten how to use my muscles. . . . The name ‘Golden Amazon’ is getting little better than a legend. Instead I’m a mother and darn near a domesticated wife. Yet . . . I like it.”

Her deep blue eyes moved to two tiny forms lying in the vegetation close by—a boy and a girl, twins, every part of their exposed skin as golden yellow as their mother’s.

“Some day,” she went on slowly, “those two children of ours are going to grow up, Chris—form the nucleus of a new species. Twenty-five years ago an accident dropped me on this planet and made me a superwoman. That strength, that inborn knowledge of the Venusian jungle and the wilds of space, has been handed on to them. My strength; your civilized culture—Grand combination!”

“Hercules and Hygeia,” Chris reflected. “God of strength and goddess of health— Yep, we chose good names for them—but I still like ‘The Heavenly Twins’ better. . . .”

Vi relaxed again, pondered. “Wonder what ever became of Welgand?” she muttered. “Remember how we got all that gang of crooks, but he just faded away into space? And been gone these four years— Not like him to do that. Of course he’s all washed up so far as establishing a criminal domination of Earth is concerned, but it’s surprising he’s made no effort to get at you and me. Seems logical he would want to break us since we broke him.”^[1]

[1] “The Amazon Fights Again”—*Fantastic Adventures*, June 1940.

“Let him try!” Chris said grimly; then he shrugged. “Oh be damned to him! We’ve made our home here; we’re happy and comfortable. Why should we bother about—?”

He broke off and sat up suddenly, frowning, as an unaccustomed sound broke the sweltering silences of the jungle. It was the recognizable throb of a space ship’s underjets.

“That’s odd!” he ejaculated. “Who’d want to come over these Hotlands anyway?”

Vi jumped to her feet, hand shading her eyes. The Hotlanders were now starting to shift about uneasily, moving into the shelter of the jungle as though in anticipation of some danger.

“Something wrong here,” the girl said briefly. “The Hotlanders can sense it quicker than we can— Yes, look!” she finished with a cry; and at that identical moment a small but powerful spaceship, its underjets now cut off, came gliding into view at low altitude over the drooping verdure of the trees. It moved unerringly towards the little clearing.

Abruptly Chris was alive to the danger. He saw a lens uncover in the base of the ship and at the same instant a blue beam cut through the hot and dusty air. It blasted a cindery scorching trail straight along to where the girl stood. Paralyzed with amazement she stared at it; then with a mighty leap Chris dived, shoved her, sent both of them staggering into the undergrowth.

“What goes on?” Vi panted, wheeling round. “Who *is* it anyway? Unless it’s—”

She broke off, watching tensely as the little ship circled abruptly, swept back again with raygun blazing dangerously. Then from the vessel’s side there suddenly dropped a life-anchor. [2] Down it fell, stopped within inches of the two sleeping infants in the vegetation. Just as quickly it recoiled, swept the two into the air, and they vanished in the open lock. Then with a burst of aggressive fire the ship nosed upward, headed voidward with ever increasing speed.

[2] Life anchor—so called because it attracts living tissue as an ordinary magnet attracts steel.—Ed.

For a full five seconds Vi was too stunned to speak. Then Chris mumbled dazedly, “A snatch! They stole the kids and—”

“Welgand!” Vi clenched her fists. “Just as we were talking about him, too. Somehow he got to know of our hideout and— Come on!”

Chris followed her hurriedly across the clearing, into the jungle where their spaceship *Ultra* lay parked.

“Say, we don’t know where he’s heading,” Chris pointed out.

“We’ll find out!” Vi retorted. “Space is a big place, and if you think I’m lying around while he steals my babies you’re mistaken. Get in!”

“But wait a minute, Vi! That was an obvious snatch. It may have been a trick to—”

The girl listened to no more. With one thrust of her whipcord arm she bundled Chris through the airlock, slammed it shut, then hurried across to the control board.

“Trouble with you, Chris . . .” she maneuvered the superfast little machine over the treetops into the densely misted sky, “is that you talk first and act afterward. That isn’t jungle law. If that *is* Welgand”—her jaws tightened—“I’ll finish the job I once nearly accomplished! And if he harms either of our babies God help him!”

Chris nodded grimly; he knew she meant it. Then he looked out of the port. In a few minutes he picked up the distant fast traveling space machine which had made the lightning abduction.

“Don’t recognize it as an ordinary vessel,” he commented. “No planetary insignia or anything— Of course a wanted criminal would hardly use a ship anybody could recognize—”

“Hardly!” Vi stared through her own window. “So he’s heading Moonward. Wonder what he wants there?”

With that she slammed on the power to maximum, lay back with straining muscles as the frightful acceleration all but crushed the breath out of her. Chris sat down with a thud, gulping for breath. These dizzying dives through space, painful even for the superhuman girl, always left him shaken and sweating.

“Sorry—got to do it,” she said curtly. “This is business—grim business. Lie down while we go to it . . .”

Chris obeyed weakly, and from then on the girl kept the ship on full power except for intervals when sheer physical anguish and the need for food demanded a relinquishment. Even so, the distant space machine managed to keep its flying start.

And to Vi’s mounting fury the distance did not lessen between them.

Through the hours—grinding hours; through Earth days—and still the bridge was not closed. Evidently the abductor was using a highly volatile mixture in his rocket chambers.

It became clear though as the time passed that the goal was the moon. Its Earth-illuminated mass—for it was almost at new Moon—became larger and larger, until at last the little ship was a silvery speck in the sunshine silhouetted against the copper bowl of the Moon.

“Vi, I still think there is more behind this than a plain snatch,” Chris insisted, watching intently through the glass. “If you weren’t so volcanic in your methods we’d have time to reason it out—”

“Yeah, and he’d have time to kill my babies! Welgand wouldn’t stop at that, don’t you forget it!” Vi stopped, her eyes narrowed as she peered ahead. Sunshine had left the distant ship now but it was still just possible to follow its movements. “Tycho crater, eh? That’s where he’s making for. Better get the spacesuits ready.”

Chris did so and she still watched intently. Finally she looked through the telescopic mirror and saw the ship land on the wide, sprawling crater of Tycho. Dimly she could see the mystic streaks and rays from the crater in the Earthshine. It made it difficult to see what happened to the ship—but apparently it vanished at last in a crack.

Vi straightened up from the mirror, face grim.

“He’s gone inside the Moon,” she said. “Take over while I get a suit on.”

Chris nodded; then when she was ready, barring helmet, he did likewise. With practised hands the girl brought the little ship down into the inky shadows of the range round the vast Tycho crater, closed the anchor switches, then screwed on her helmet and snapped on the intercommunication.

“Whatever happens, we stick together,” she announced. “It may be a trick, even as you figured, but either way we’ll beat it. Come on.”

She slapped a raygun belt around her waist then opened the airlock. She paused, surprised. Chris too halted. Now they came to look at Tycho’s floor at close quarters, most of it quite clear in the Earthshine, they saw there was something queer about it. It radiated streaks and rays as usual in hazy pearl-like luster, only it was *not* a rocky arid plain. . . .

“Say, this is—glass!” Vi murmured. “Or something very like it!”

She was right. The fact became clearer as they advanced out onto it. It stretched perhaps a mile in diameter and then merged into the rocky foothills of the spiked mountains surrounding the crater.

“Not glass, but a mineral of some kind,” the girl said, her face perplexed inside her helmet. “Wonder what—? Oh, be hanged! We’ve a job to do. We’ve got to find that crack— Over there, I think.”

They started on a hurried, earnest search. It ended at last in a distinctly visible cleft leading downwards in the foothills.

“Yes, this must be it,” Chris decided, gazing down. “A spaceship could get down if skillfully driven. We go below?”

Vi didn’t trouble to answer that. She swung herself lithely in the trifling gravitation and began to scramble down into the depths. Utter darkness closed round the pair of them—the complete abysmal dark of lunar night. Then as she descended Vi felt something scraping its way up her body. She had gone below it before she had realized it was a sprung trapdoor opened by the pressure of her body. Chris’ feet became visible through it as she switched on her helmet-lamp. Then as they both came below the trap it sprang shut again—

A voice spoke curtly, suddenly. It was a grim merciless voice that neither of them had heard for four years.

“Okay, take your helmets off! There’s air down here!”

Slowly Vi turned, realized she was now on flat ground, inside an immense underground cave. Lights came up suddenly from roughly slung electric globes. A little distance away across the enormous space was the ship they had been pursuing. Immediately facing her and Chris was a tall man in flying kit, thin-faced, black haired, sunken-cheeked.

“Welgand!” Vi eyed him for a moment, unscrewed her helmet and shook free her jet black hair. “I guessed it—”

“Still smart, eh, Amazon?” he asked dryly. “And still spoiling for a fight! I figured on that. That’s why I frisked those brats of yours. Took me some time to locate your hideout, but I made it at last—”

“Where are they?” Vi broke in venomously. “If you’ve hurt them in the slightest, Welgand, I’ll—”

“Hurt them?” Welgand grinned crookedly. “I’ve killed them! That makes you squirm, doesn’t it? Killed ’em, I tell you, just as I’ll kill you next and this nosey husband of yours! Why did I snatch the brats anyway? Because I figured you’d come blundering after ’em— *Here* where nobody can help you, where no Hotlanders or Venusian jungles can be your allies. Smart, eh?”

Vi hardly heard the most of Welgand’s words. “I’ve killed them!” was the one thing blazing through her brain; and when it registered in its full murderous implication she sprang forward, almost involuntarily, gloved hands out-flung. With bone-cracking force her fingers closed over Welgand’s raygun hand— But in the interval of years he had evidently learned a trick or two.

He bent his knees suddenly, relaxed, then twisted. Vi found herself flung clean over his head; but she fell lightly in the slight gravity and in that time Chris had thrown himself into the attack. He managed to land a slogging punch that send Welgand reeling, but he still held onto his gun.

Then as Vi scrambled to her feet and prepared to leap again she stopped, relaxed. The big underground place had suddenly become alive with men. A dozen at least, all with guns steadily pointed.

“Better take it easy,” Welgand advised harshly, straightening up. “Get those space suits off, the pair of you. Al, take their guns!”

CHAPTER II

Solar Vengeance

When the job of frisking had been done Chris and the girl stood passive. But there was a mask of vindictive fury on Vi's face that reminded Welgand of a tigress robbed of her cubs. He tightened his hold on his gun, jerked his head.

"Get moving!"

Outnumbered, boiling with fury, Chris and Vi obeyed. They crossed the waste of cavern then through a naturally chiseled hole in the rock face. It brought them into an even mightier place. Over their heads at a considerable height was a gray mineral roof, supported on four titanic pillars of pumice rock. In the floor of the cavern, contrived so as to be exactly centered under the mineral roof, was a pit. It was perhaps half a mile across and apparently went down into nothing.

Vi turned from looking into the inexplicable depths.

"Well, get on with it!" she snapped. "Going to throw us down there, I suppose? What are we waiting for?"

Welgand came up with a grim smile. "You underrate me, Amazon," he murmured. "Throwing you down there is not my object, even though it does go right through to a lens on the Moon's other side. It's really quite a clever device, I flatter myself. There are shields controlled from my power-room—"

Vi looked puzzled. "Lens? Right through the Moon?"

"I assure you I have not been idle in these four years— Keep on moving, both of you—up those stone steps there."

Bullied by the guns they moved up the steps indicated and found themselves rising to the level of the mineral roof. A trapdoor in the wall let them through on to the top of it. It was the floor now, not the ceiling—but above was yet another roof of natural mineral.

"Just what is this?" Chris demanded, swinging round. "What's the idea of this glorified ballroom floor business—?"

"Did you notice the center of Tycho's crater floor?" Welgand asked.

"Yeah, sure—Mineral, polished, like frosted glass—" Chris gave a start. "You mean this is it?"

"Above your heads there—the roof," Welgand said. "In all, there are three mineral sections like that here—and a similar set up on the Moon's other side. The mineral is quartz isotope, peculiar to the Moon. I have had them ground into special shapes, these sections. I believe the Moon's streaks and rays are explained by the quartz. I used big proportions of it to make giant lenses. Every condenser lens has three parts, as you know. Below you—this floor—is one lens. Affixed to it and forming the roof of the cavern we just left is the second lens; above in the floor of Tycho is the third lens. A complete giant condenser. And on the other side of the Moon is an identical setup."

"But—but what—?" Chris gazed mystifiedly at the girl.

Welgand gave a grim smile and snapped his fingers. Two of his trigger men came in with immensely strong metal frameworks, perhaps six feet high, and supplied with heavy triple linked chain.

“Fasten ’em up!” he ordered briefly; then watched as Vi and Chris were forced into the frames, their wrists drawn up to the diagonal corners, their ankles likewise. The manacles clicked, left them both spreadeagled with feet barely on the frame bottom.

“This time,” Welgand said steadily, putting his gun away, “I am going to do the thing properly, Amazon—same to you, Wilson. I had those frames made specially of hardened triple-x steel, proof against even your muscles, I guess.”

“Suppose you quit driveling and tell us what the idea is?” Vi suggested bitterly.

“Okay.” Welgand’s thin face darkened. “Because of you, Amazon, my schemes for the domination of the world collapsed: I was forced to dash into space as a fugitive. Only one thing was left for me—revenge! Revenge on you and the Earth which outlawed me! For four years I have worked on this scheme, gathered a few men around me—fugitive engineers and suchlike. To cut it short, we decided to use the natural quartz of the Moon for a giant lens. We bored a tunnel right through the Moon, a tunnel specially arranged to dead center on this giant lens. It was not difficult because the Moon is honeycombed with pumic rock anyway. When the shields in the tunnel are withdrawn—actuated by my power house machinery—the sun when at the zenith on the other side of the Moon—that is new Moon to Earth—shines right down the tunnel as a single ray and passes through these lenses.”

“Well?” Chris said that, uncomprehending. But the girl’s face was becoming strained as she glimpsed the underlying idea.

“Tomorrow—that is in two hours—it will be absolute new moon,” Welgand said slowly. “And tomorrow is the twentieth of February, 2064. There is a total eclipse of the sun on the Earth. So, when I withdraw my shields—”

“A cosmic burning glass!” Vi cried in horror, suddenly getting at the truth. “A ray of concentrated solar power and heat burning through the moon, gathered into focus by these lenses and—”

“And concentrated on Earth, since this side of the Moon obviously faces the Earth at all times.” Welgand gave a merciless grin. “Revenge! The mightiest revenge one man ever took—! A ray, sweeping at two thousand miles an hour across the world! First Alaska, across the Pacific, across the United States—to Europe— Yes, across the most populated parts of the world. And deep in the umbra’s absolute cone shadow will lie death! A burning trail will be left everywhere the total eclipse passes, just as a sunlight recording globe leaves a charred trail along its chart. Magnificent, is it not?”

“You’re mad!” Chris shouted desperately, struggling futilely to tear himself loose from the chains. “You can’t do this thing, Welgand—”

“I’m not mad, just ingenious,” he said softly. “And . . . embittered. I have arranged it so that you will be the first to feel the shaft of unthinkable heat as it blasts up the tunnel to these lenses. Being between the lenses you will char to cinders. A few seconds later when the beam hits Earth others will die—Those damnable, stinking others who outlawed me! Total eclipse is right. Now you know why I brought you here.”

Welgand stopped, turned away sharply to the metal trapdoor in the wall, slammed and bolted it behind him. The two were alone in the dim yellow light of a single power bulb. And that bulb—clever thought!—was placed directly over an electric clock. It clicked steadily as it chopped off half seconds.

“A fiend!” Chris whispered. “That’s what he’s become, Vi— No longer a master scientist with a criminal brain, but a monster! First he kills our kids, chains us up like this, then— Do you realize hundreds of the Earth’s best scientists will be watching the eclipse and will get the full blast of the ray? Moving at two thousand miles an hour there’ll be hardly a chance to get clear of it—!”

“That obviously is part of the inhuman ingenuity of the idea,” Vi said slowly. “Only thing I do not believe is that he killed the babies: that was put in to torture us. He’s got more sense than destroy children with such possibilities—” She came suddenly to action. “Somehow we’ve got to move! We’ve *got* to! Everything depends on it—”

With that she looked up and studied her wrists drawn diagonally up over her head. She pulled with all her strength on the chains, but Welgand had been right. They were proof against her muscles this time. And again, the frames were so designed as to make any real effort impossible. Time and again Vi threw herself into the effort, but without success. Her feet hardly touched the frame bottom anyway.

“No dice?” Chris asked hollowly.

“Nope. Seems Welgand has— Wait a minute!” A gleam came into the girl’s eyes. “There may be one trick he forgot—the lesser gravity! It’s worth a try.”

Puzzled, Chris watched her. She lurched herself back and forth violently until the entire frame toppled over, slamming her spreadeagled on her back.

“What’s the good of that?” Chris demanded, staring down as he saw her gathering her supple body for a tremendous effort.

“Just this— Pulling downwards against my wrists *towards* gravity, and with my feet nearly clear of the ground, was useless. But lying flat and tugging horizontally I’ve got the gravity as my advantage. I’ve got about three times the normal pulling power which should compensate for the extra thickness of chain— Here we go!”

Chris watched with bated breath as she suddenly threw everything she had got into the muscles of her arms. It was an amazing sight as she dragged on the frame like one racked. Harder—harder, until the tendons and veins stood out on her arms and shoulders, until her face began to flush with the strain.

Then came that sound Chris had so often heard before—the creaking, crouching grind of metal parting along its forged ends. Again! Vi was like a stretched spring— *Again!* And the chains holding her wrists snapped abruptly. She relaxed instantly, breathing hard.

After a moment or two she was herself again, sat up and wrenched at the chains on her ankles. They gave way at last and she stood up, manacles still on her wrists and legs. She gave a ghostly smile.

“Chains do not a prison make,” she misquoted. “Now let’s see what we can do with you. . . .”

It was easier with Chris for their combined efforts went to work. In a few minutes he was free, stood up beside the girl as she massaged her grazed and bleeding wrists.

“Now for Welgand,” Chris breathed ominously, staring round the gray expanse.

They hurried to the metal door. That it was locked they had fully expected since they’d heard Welgand slam the bolts. The girl pulled at it, shook her head, thought. Then her eyes wandered to the ticking electric clock.

“Yes, it’s a chance,” she murmured. “Put that clock out of action and a fuse will blow somewhere in Welgand’s powerhouse. He’ll be sure to investigate—or send somebody to do

it. Part of the essential torture, don't forget. Right! Stand by that door. Moment somebody comes in shut it and leave the rest to me."

She turned, gave a mighty leap against the weak gravity. It carried her up momentarily to the clock. She drove her fist right into its face to the accompaniment of a blinding flash, then dropped back to the lens floor. In a moment she was at the door opposite Chris, her body quivering expectantly.

Her hunch had been right for presently there came sounds outside the door. Bolts slammed; the door opened. Two trigger men came straight with leveled guns. The moment they saw the fallen, empty frames they stopped and stared.

"What in hell—?" one of them started to say; then he broke off with a gurgling grunt as a yellow arm hooked out of the gloom and crushed under his bristly chin. His companion was no better off, for as he turned an arm hooked under his jaw too.

Turning ever so slightly both men could see the face of the girl between their own. It was wearing an expression that struck horror deep into their souls.

"Take—take it easy, Amazon," the one gasped, striving frantically to free himself. "I've—I've nothing against you—"

"I've plenty against you though," she breathed. "No quarter this time! It's not plain crime anymore but massacre and baby snatching—*my* babies!"

Chris clanged the door shut and waited with folded arms.

The girl released one of the men suddenly, snatched at his gun. She missed it. He raised it, but not quickly enough for she raised the other man off his feet and flung him clean on top of the exploding weapon. He dropped, a hole burned through his chest.

Gun jolted from his hand the other man made a dash for it, until in two enormous leaps Vi caught up on him. He crashed to his knees, felt fingers of steel creep into his neck, tighter—tighter, until the cavern swam in a roaring tide. . . .

Vi released him suddenly, stood up with a grim face. Turning she picked up the two rayguns, tossed one to Chris as he stood looking at her.

"Yes, they're dead," she said curtly, interpreting his expression. "Sorry to outrage those precious civilized notions of yours but I'm playing the game my way this time. I'll destroy this Welgand menace forever, or die doing it. Come on!"

She snatched open the metal door and together they hurried down the steps—but warily—to the next lens. Nobody intercepted them— So down to the main cavern floor where lay the tunnel-pit. A triggerman on guard suddenly jumped to his feet. That was as far as he got.

One hand knocked his gun flying; a fist shot out into his jaw and knocked him blinded and breathless against the cavern wall. Then Vi had him by the neck, forced him to stand upright.

"One chance for your life, ugly mug," she breathed. "Where's Welgand's' power-room located? Come on, come on!" She slammed him mercilessly back and forth across the face as he hesitated.

"Wait—wait a minute! I'll show you— Lay off me! This way."

"Hurry!" the girl snapped, her raygun ready.

The man fled before her and Chris across the cavern and to a low balcony of rock. A little way along it he stopped and pointed to a set of some twenty steps leading down to a metal door in a crevice below.

"In there?" Chris gasped. "Hell! Rock and metal! It's invincible!"

“May not be; depends on this guy,” the girl retorted. She prodded him significantly. “Go on, yell out. Tell Welgand he’s wanted. Quick!”

The thug hesitated, measuring her, then he nodded and shouted loudly.

“Hey, Chief! Quick! Come on out—!”

The girl glanced towards the door to watch—and that was the movement the thug had been awaiting. Like a flash he landed out his fist, sent the girl spinning back against the rocky wall helplessly, her gun flying out of her hand. He started to run for it then, away along the gallery—but Chris was ready for that. He leveled his gun, fired. He felt a grim little thrill as he saw the smoky patch on the gangster’s back. He dropped flat, motionless.

“Chris—out of sight!” Vi panted. “Before Welgand sees us. We’ve got to entice him out and slip in while he’s away— Look out!”

They both flattened themselves in the shadow of the rocky wall as the power-room door in the crevice below opened. Welgand stood silhouetted against a glare from within. He waited. So did Vi and Chris, hoping against hope he’d come forward and investigate. Now they had lost their stooge they could do nothing to prompt him.

But at last, to their burning chagrin, he shrugged and went back in again, slammed the door resolutely.

CHAPTER III

Desperate Straits

“Damn!” Chris swore. “Evidently he didn’t think it was very important, else he didn’t get all the words through that thick door. What do we do now? Reckoning three of these low-lifers out of the way there must be nine of ’em in with him. No others around here. How do we get him out?”

“I don’t know.” Vi looked rather desperate. “Time’s flying too—”

Chris snapped his fingers. “Welgand’s spaceship! It’s still in the cavern back there—”

“So what?”

“Get a raygun machine from it and melt that darned door down!”

“Um—he did blaze away with it back on Venus. Probably we could detach it—” Vi shook her dark head abruptly. “No use. By the time we’d gotten through the door Welgand would be all set to blast us— But there’s another angle to the ship,” she went on, turning and heading swiftly along the gallery. “It has space radio. If we don’t manage to break down that door, or anything should happen to us, we can at least warn Earth to stand clear of the eclipse track and evacuate those in its path.”

“Still doesn’t solve how we bust that door open,” Chris said worriedly, hurrying beside her. “We could imitate a voice to get him out only he might rumble the ruse—”

“We’ll think of something: this is more important right now.”

In a few moments they were back in the main cavern, hurried over to where Welgand’s ship still stood. It was all set and in order, space radio fully equipped. Chris closed the airlock for safety as the girl settled before the instruments and switched on.

“Welgand’s radio will probably be in his powerhouse,” she reflected. “Here’s to hoping he hasn’t got it on so he won’t know what we’re up to here.”

She depressed the signal button on the Earth short-wave band and an answer soon came in the speaker. She cut it down to low tone.

“Calling Emergency Radio Station at Heaviside,” she intoned. “This is the Golden Amazon speaking from the Moon. No time for explanations: just listen. Clear all people and valuables from the track of the total eclipse of the sun due to begin in about two hours. Dispatch an emergency squad at once to pick up Welgand, fugitive from Earth. That is all. Repeat please.”

The operator gave it back word for word. The girl broke contact, thought a moment, then said,

“May help to save plenty of lives anyway, if not all of them. Even at that millions of dollars’ worth of property will go up in smoke unless we somehow get into that power room — We’ve got to do it suddenly, surprisingly, get Welgand off his guard so we can force the truth about the children out of him. Come on—see what we can do.”

“Bit queer he doesn’t come to see what happened to those guys who came to look at the clock, isn’t it?” Chris puzzled, as they returned along the narrow gallery.

Vi shrugged. “Probably they’re outside men—spend their time in and around these galleries. He’ll think they looked the job over and went back to their posts. Never suspect we got away.”

She paused as they came into the shadows of the gallery and stood looking down at the power-room door.

“Looks hopeless to me,” Chris muttered.

Vi did not reply immediately: she was studying the four massive pillars which supported the enormous quartz lens back in the cavern. Then as her gaze moved back to the gallery her eyes sharpened.

“Take a look . . .”

Chris stared at an immense boulder of rock jutting out of the rock face almost immediately behind them. It was enormous in size, like a pear-shaped protuberance.

“If that were free we might use it,” Vi murmured.

“What! Anyway, how do you propose to loosen it? It’s too heavy to move even in this light gravity—”

“Might break it free with our rayguns.”

Vi set to work immediately and with a shrug Chris followed suit. They fired charge after charge at the pumice-like rock—silent shafts of flame that hurled dust and chippings into the air. Their guns were about burned out and useless when they had finished, but the neck around the boulder root had narrowed immensely.

The girl nodded when she had studied it, shoved at it. Nothing happened. She tried again, pushing mightily. There followed a cracking, splintering sound and the boulder, all of twenty feet high, dropped suddenly from its hold in the rock face and rolled ponderously for a short distance.

“Now what?” Chris demanded; then he looked worriedly at the rock face. “Say, we’ve fissured it a hell of a lot. If the cracks widen at all—”

“Be hanged to that. Give me a hand.”

He only grasped what she was aiming at when their combined efforts edged the vast thing directly in line with the steps leading down to the power-room door. Then Vi pushed at it with her back, dug her heels in the floor and shoved. Once, twice— Three times. Then it toppled over the top step, sent her sprawling. Instantly she scrambled up and they both watched in awe as it pelted and bounced down the steps faster and faster—

It crashed into the metal door with cyclonic impact, ripped it clean off its hinges and took part of the frame with it.

“Now!” Vi yelled. “Quick as you can go—”

She jumped as she spoke, went flying through the air and landed on the top of the now stationary boulder. In a moment she had slid down it and into the power-room. Without a second’s hesitation she leapt again, clean on top of Welgand as he stood glancing round expectantly, obviously off his guard by the sudden onslaught.

He hardly had a chance, so fast did things happen. The girl’s bunched fist struck him clean in the jaw as he waited with hand on his gun holster. Back of her blow was all the steel-spring strength of her supernatural muscles. Welgand lifted right off his feet, head jerked back and arms sprawling. He collided with a switchboard and brought up sharp. It saved him from falling. He let out a mighty yell.

Chris appeared suddenly, dived for the nearest gangster coming up to lend assistance. In a flying tackle Chris brought him to his knees. A lightning uppercut brought the man’s teeth together with a click; he fell again, dazed and bewildered.

But now the place seemed to be spawning trigger-men. The girl, clutching the dazed Welgand, found herself abruptly beleaguered with pointing rayguns. She whirled like lightning, gripped Welgand by his pants belt and held him in front of her as a shield.

“Okay,” she panted, raising him so that his feet kicked helplessly off the floor. “It’s up to you mugs now— Come over here, Chris! Up to you mugs, I say! First, where are those babies of mine—?” Then as the men scowled furiously she yelled, “I’ll give you five seconds! And I’m in no mood for niceties! Five seconds and I lam Welgand’s head on the floor so hard it’ll mash his brains— *Come on!*”

Welgand struggled desperately in her iron grip at the words. Her only response was to raise him even higher.

“One . . . !” she breathed implacably. “Two—!”

“Hey, Amazon! Better take it easy!”

She looked up sharply beyond the nearer trigger-men to yet another gangster at the far end of the instrument-littered place. Her breath caught as she saw him holding the two babies on high, one in each hand.

“Checkmate!” he yelled. “They’re alive and kicking—but they won’t be unless you release the Chief. Come on, get wise to yourself!”

Vi hesitated, in a quandary. Finally she released Welgand so abruptly he thumped to the floor. He got to his feet with a livid face, holding his anguishing jaw.

“If you know what’s good for you you’ll hand my babies over,” Vi snapped.

“What the hell do you think we are?” Welgand sneered. He glanced at the gangster. “You hang onto ’em, Curly—”

“Why, you—”

Vi flung herself blindly towards the two children struggling in the man’s hands, but this time sheer desperation upset her calculations. A foot shot out and tripped her. The next moment her arms were bent tightly behind her. Four of the gangsters pinned her down by main strength, panted and puffed as they bound her threshing limbs. At last she was pinioned, forced to her feet. She looked savagely across at Chris and beheld him in the same plight.

“I don’t just know how you got away from that frame, Amazon,” Welgand said slowly, his voice deadly; “but I do know you’ll get no further than this power-room. I’m taking no more chances. You can watch me operate the eclipse-ray from here. When that is done and you’ve seen the full layout of my vengeance I’ll settle with you—fully!” He rubbed his jaw again furiously; it felt as though it were broken.

“Listen, Welgand,” Vi said, straining forward. “I’m making no deals—that isn’t my way; but I’ll do anything you want if you’ll only give my two kids a break. You said before that you’d killed them—I guessed that was for torture value, and now I’ve proved it. What do you want me to do?”

“There’s nothing you can do to get out of this,” Welgand retorted. “The only break either of you will get is in the neck— As for your two brats, I’ve got a future for them. I’ll bring them up my way—”

“*Your way!*” Vi shouted. “Crime, villainy, murder—”

“*My way,*” Welgand repeated stonily. “They’re exceptional kids, being yours. A boy and a girl of a superrace to come—the strength of ten men. Venus-reared—swift, intelligent, cruel and terrible as the saber toothed tiger if trained the right way—*my way.* Your kids, Amazon! What better vengeance than that their whole lives he devoted to the very thing you have tried

to destroy? I foresee a superrace of men and women under my orders. Good eh?" Welgand grinned tauntingly, then he remembered his jaw and winced instead.

"You'll not make it, Welgand," the girl whispered. "I'll get you somehow. Even if you kill me I'll come back. I'll break you in the end! Those are my babies—a new race, yes—but destined to found an empire of magnificent man and womanhood between them when I get too old to fight anymore. You shall not have them!"

"That's what you think," Welgand answered callously; then he glanced at his watch. "Anyway, I've no time for argument. Eclipse time is in ten minutes. Make yourselves comfortable," he added dryly, as they stood pinioned helplessly before him.

Bitterly they stood watching as he turned to his control board. It was not particularly elaborate, was obviously meant to operate an immense level-mechanism at the far end of the laboratory.

"This moves the shields aside from the lenses," Welgand said in explanation. "It— You listening, Amazon?"

She jerked her eyes from the two infants still in the grip of the grinning trigger-man farther down the laboratory.

"I heard you, yes," she retorted. "You pull the shields aside, the sun sends its power through the tunnel and—"

"In exactly eight more minutes," Welgand nodded. "Then . . ."

He paused, frowning a little as from somewhere there came a dull cracking sound. It was followed by a heavy rumbling bump—then silence.

"What was that?" He wheeled round on his men.

"Only some rocks tumbling away when you moved the shield, I guess," one of them answered.

Welgand reflected, then nodded. He closed another switch and a window on the far wall sprang into view as a steel shutter shot back. Beyond it was dead black.

"There you see the inside of the shaft," he explained. "You will see the sunlight pass up it— Ah! Notice that pearly haze? That is the beginning!"

Breathing hard, Chris and Vi waited. The girl strained and tugged at her cords as she watched first the snicking clock over the switchboard and then the gathering glow on the inspection-window. She knew there could never have been time on Earth to clear everybody out of the way to safety. Havoc beyond imagination would be inevitable the instant the umbra of the eclipse struck the Earth.

She pulled again, tautened her arms—then her eyes caught sight of Curly holding the babies. He shook his head negatively. It was a threat—possibly bluff—but Vi realized she could take no chances. Again she relaxed, wishing she could not hear the merciless click—click—click of the timepiece.

Welgand and his men stood in ghoulish satisfaction as the pearly glow deepened. It became creamy, then white; until at last the first direct ray streamed through. Instantly the window became blindingly brilliant as the effulgence poured up the shaft.

"Wonderful!" Welgand breathed. "My supreme moment! The consummation of four years' hard work."

"Yeah, you said it, Chief!"

"Serve those boiled shirt scientists right!"

“If ever there was a dirty rotten swine, it’s you, Welgand,” Chris panted. “You ought to be damned well—”

Welgand reached forward, slapped Chris across the face with such force that he fell helplessly on his back. He turned and glared up—then Welgand’s eyes shifted to the girl. He met the steely stare of her deep blue eyes.

“Better lay off me, Welgand,” she breathed. “You’ve already done enough. If I ever catch up on you—!”

“Not where you’re going, Amazon,” Welgand said calmly. “I’ve one more surprise to spring on you—and this weak-kneed husband of yours. That window opens inward into the shaft—”

Vi looked at it, startled.

“You guessed it,” Welgand commented grimly. “I decided you should die by the same system that destroyed my Earthly foes. That you escaped the lenses does not mean you will escape the method— The concentrated heat down that moon shaft will kill you, slowly—far more slowly than would have been the case on the lens. Both of you will die in that shaft. I guess you crossed me for the last time, Amazon!”

He waited a moment, added shortly, “Okay, boys—go to it.”

Two of the men moved instantly, hauled the girl up between them and carried her struggling, wriggling form to the window, dropped her under it by the wall. Then they did the same for Chris. Welgand came up, yanked the girl up by her ropes and grinned at her taut, furious face.

“Bit of a come-down for the mighty Amazon, eh?” he asked dryly; then his face setting like granite he raised her suddenly in his arms to the level of the window. Her feet indeed were pressing on the glass when something happened— It was so sudden it drowned out Chris’ wild cry of alarm.

It sounded like a vast explosion from somewhere above the power-room and was followed by a crumbling, grumbling roar that rose with the seconds and set the floor shaking. Small rocks began to bounce through the shattered doorway and rolled across the floor; clouds of choking dust followed them.

“A moonquake!” Curly yelled hoarsely, springing up. “Quick, Chief, we’ve gotta get outa here—”

Welgand looked round in alarm, then dropped the helpless girl back to the floor. In his anxiety he seemed suddenly oblivious to his heinous scheme of destruction and vengeance. Thinking only of himself now he raced across the quivering floor as the din increased, snatched the two children from the arms of the running Curly, and with one bound was with them over the rock blocking the door.

He was the only one that got through. The hell exploded suddenly into an onslaught of stones and rock, burying not only Curly but the rest of the men as they made belated moves to reach safety.

CHAPTER IV

Settling of Accounts

“Looks bad, Vi,” Chris panted, squirming to free himself. “We—”

“Lie flat!” the girl shouted hoarsely, glancing up suddenly, and simultaneously she pressed herself as low as possible to the floor.

Not a second too soon for the immense laboratory roof suddenly split its entire length, demolished itself in a hail of rocks and boulders that crumbled inward. The whole Moon seemed to be sliding and shifting. Chris winced as the pumicey stuff rained down on top of him, burying him, filling his mouth and ears with dust and chippings. Bound as he was he found himself utterly pinned when at last the disturbance began to show signs of ending.

“Vi!” His voice was choked and muffled. “Vi, you still around?”

“Yeah—lie still a moment . . .”

Then Chris heard the crack and clink of stone as the girl heaved and twisted herself out of the mass. In a while he heard her labored breathing . . . then the pressure upon him began to lighten as she flung away the stones at top speed, finally dragged him to his feet. He saw broken ends of cord clinging now along with the manacle cuffs to her wrists and ankles.

“Won’t be a second,” she panted, and snapped his cords through like string. “Easy enough to escape these cords now the rayguns are not trained on us—Guess we can thank the light gravity for not being crushed under this lot—There! We’re ready!”

Chris stared round him dazedly. The laboratory was a shambles. The entire roof had fallen in, leaving it open to the cavern beyond. Here and there an arm or leg sticking from the debris testified to the fate of the rest of Welgand’s stooges.

“Don’t know whether they’re dead or not—no time to look,” Vi snapped. “Welgand got the kids and that’s all we need to know—”

She caught Chris’ arm and they blundered across the fallen rubble into the cavern. Now they saw more clearly what had happened. One of the four immense rock pillars supporting the lowest quartz lens had snapped in twain, bringing down half the wall with it.

“A miniature cataclysm,” Chris breathed. “Say, that rock we pulled out must have started it. I warned you about that fissure—”

Vi did not even seem to notice. She stared at the blank space where Welgand’s ship had been.

“Gone! I expected it— He wouldn’t stop to move the *Ultra* anyway, so that’s our last hope. Come on!”

“We’ve no spacesuits, though,” Chris exclaimed, as he followed her up the shaft giving egress to the surface.

“We’re going to chance it,” she retorted. “You can stay here if you want. I’m stronger than you.”

He had not known her brutal frankness was born of desperation he’d have answered hotly. As it was he remained silent, but followed just the same.

“It won’t be easy,” Vi said, as they went on up. “It means a brief climb and a run in sheer void and zero cold—but it can be done! Free space is a perfect insulator of heat; you radiate heat faster than it can escape. A body can stay in space for a while without bursting; depends

how strong the body is— Yes, I can risk it. The slighter gravity will help in making a prodigious dash.”

She stopped speaking as the trap was reached. She tugged it down, hesitated a second, then plunged through. Chris followed her—into hell. Blinding cold wrapped him immediately. He felt the searing vacuum of the airless lunar night, gulped and struggled to hold his breath. He floundered, almost fell, his head singing with iron bands clamped round it.

He was dimly aware that the girl stooped, whipped him up and bundled him up the remainder of the rocky slope: then holding onto him tightly she leapt—once, twice—three times, hurled by her more than human leg muscles. But even she was weakening noticeably as she fumbled through the *Ultra's* outer airlock.

Chris floundered through the last airlock and lay gulping on the control room floor. He looked up bleakly as the girl followed him, spun the lock screws. Blood was trickling from her nose.

“Guess it’s the last time I want to try that,” she panted. “I thought I was going to blow apart any minute—Get the restorative out while I pick up that scum, Welgand.”

By the time Chris had handed over the glass of restorative the girl had the *Ultra* sweeping over the Tycho crater. She glanced below momentarily.

“Looks as though that quake put Welgand’s infernal mirror out of focus anyway,” she said briefly. “No sign of a ray, even though there is an eclipse cone— Ah! There he is!” Her eyes narrowed vengefully as she stared ahead.

“Heading to Venus,” Chris murmured. “I get it! He thinks we passed out and figures on taking the kids there to bring them up where they can get the Venusian radiation—” He paused as he looked rearwards. “Hallo! Space patrol—Earth ships. Heading Moonward—”

“The ones I sent for,” Vi nodded. She switched on her space radio. “Hallo there, Earth patrol! Amazon calling—*Ultra* about a hundred miles ahead of you. Drop two parties to look over the lunar interior setup; the rest of you follow me as well as you can. Welgand has got away again.”

“Say, Amazon, what goes on?” demanded an officer’s voice. “We cleared all the folks out of the eclipse track—many as we could anyway. We were in space when the eclipse began. That ray showed momentarily then veered off sideways and went out—”

“No time to explain now,” Vi retorted. “Follow me!”

She switched off, clamped her hand down on the power lever and set it moving up notch by notch. With terrific overpowering speed the little machine whizzed ever faster through the void, eating up the distance, leaving the police squad far behind as their numbers broke up.

“More distance we can cover before Welgand gets wise that we’re on his tail and the better,” Vi panted. “More ahead we are of the police and the better, too. This is my tea-party, and no hounds of the law are going to spoil it. Just wait!”

She slipped the lever to the last notch, hardly seemed to notice the appalling pressure so tense was her whole being on the job of settling accounts with the fleeing scientist.

Welgand’s space machine, fast though it was, began to lose ground to the *Ultra*. At first it was a puzzle to Vi, then she snapped her fingers. “Because of the children!” she exclaimed. “He dare not use full power. Last time he had a vast head start which kept him ahead; this time he hasn’t . . . Hallo, what’s that?”

Evidently he had become aware of pursuit for from the rear of his machine there suddenly blazed the livid flare of a raygun.

"I guessed he'd do that," the girl muttered, plunging dizzily to miss the long-distance beam. "He knows I can't hit back in case we blow the kids up too."

She swerved again, careened in a mighty arc. Her jaw set as she heard one of the *Ultra's* outer plates go tearing off under a transient glancing blast of withering fire. And now she was commencing to overtake Welgand's machine in leaps and bounds: she cut speed a little, manipulated the rocket controls with all the skill at her command to dodge his repeated fire.

"Just what do you figure on doing, Vi?" Chris demanded, rising up from the wall bed as the speed decreased. "We can't keep up this cat and dog act forever: he'll blast our vitals for sure with a lucky hit. Then what?"

"I've got the thing figured," she answered quickly. "I can't blast his ship itself, but I *can* blast his airlock. There are three of 'em, remember. Once I've opened the outer one I'll get through the other two in double quick time—"

"But he'll guess the idea!"

"No; that's where you come in." She sprang up and motioned to the control board. Chris took over the controls as she scrambled into a space suit.

"Your job is to distract his attention," she went on earnestly. "Keep his aim fixed on this ship: do all you can to dodge him. Leave the rest to me. This is my personal job!"

Before Chris could say anything she screwed on her helmet, picked up a heavy sub-standard raygun and fastened it to her waist. Carefully she made her way to the emergency lock away from the view of Welgand's machine; then slipped herself out into space and hung onto her lifeline.

Automatically the gravity of the *Ultra* kept her close to it. She waited, hanging onto the rope while Chris writhed and plunged the ship around, maneuvering at last so that he came up under the belly of Welgand's machine.

Vi was waiting for that vital second. She thrust her feet against the *Ultra* and the recoil whizzed her across the briefly narrow gap. Simultaneously she let go of her lifeline and clung onto the projections round Welgand's ship's airlock. She was pretty sure he had not seen her, busy as he was at the rear of the vessel and with its external center hidden from his view.

Smiling grimly inside her helmet Vi hooked one arm around the lock hinge and went to work with the heavy gun. White heat blistered round the clamps of the operculum. Metal began to flow in a white hot pool as the machine continued to hurtle onwards through the void. Time and again the *Ultra* came whizzing round, plunging and sweeping the abyss. Far away the police squad was commencing to catch up—

Then the lock gave. The girl slid inside the vessel quickly, whipped out her ordinary raygun and held it tightly. As she had hoped, the second airlock was double levered, openable from inside and out. She went past it quickly, shut it and took off her helmet. The last door faced her.

Abruptly she flung it open—

"*Reach, Welgand!*"

Welgand, the two infants on chairs on either side of him, swung around violently from his raygun mechanism. An astounded expression came over his cruel vindictive visage.

"Amazon! How in hell did you—?"

He raised his arms slowly and the girl moved forward; then even as she did so his left hand dropped and whipped out his gun. He upped and fired simultaneously from the hip.

His guess was right in one sense: the girl did not dare fire back in case she hit her babies: but Welgand's own lightning movement was too swift. He blistered paint and metal on the wall beside the girl as she leapt like a tigress to one side—

Nor did she stop leaping. She jumped again the moment she hit the floor, tossed her gun on the switchboard bench and lammed out with her right fist.

It caught Welgand on his already injured jaw just a fraction of a second after he had tried to dodge. The result was he spun like a top, his gun flying out of his fist. He reached for his remaining right-hand gun but it was too late. Vi's hand closed round his wrist like a vise, exerted a crushing pressure that grew worse with the seconds. His face lifted in anguish and round came her fist clean into it, sent him hurtling backwards helplessly against the wall.

He brought up with a jolt that shook his teeth. His hair was tumbled; he was sweating violently. He realized now he was not looking on a woman at all, but the real superhuman jungle female who at heart was still a savage of the Venusian jungles. Her face was the nearest thing to a human tigress he had ever seen.

"We've a score to settle, Welgand—a long outstanding one," she said in a low voice. "You were going to steal my babies, poison their lives, make super-criminals out of them. I warned you what would happen when I caught up on you—"

"Wait, Amazon—wait a minute!" Welgand fought for breath. "We can settle this thing without violence. You don't have to be a murderess—"

Vi wasted no more time on his panicky drooling. Frantically though he tried to avoid her she vaulted after him, right and left across the control room, caught up on him and brought him to his knees at last with her forearm hooked under his chin. Her knee crushed mercilessly into the small of his back. He recognized that favorite hold of hers—a strangling backward pressure that no human being had ever yet escaped.

"Amazon! *Amazon!*" he screamed huskily, choking. "In God's name—!"

Tighter her arm closed, and tighter. Welgand could no longer speak. The world was roaring in his anguished ears—flaming pain burned the length of his spine— Then amazingly the whole thing relaxed and he tumbled spent and gasping to the floor.

He had an idea there were voices, furious cries from the girl. He shook his befuddled head and got up slowly, quivering still from the expectancy of death that had gripped him. Now he saw the sullen, bitter faced girl in the grip of a party of police officers—space police. And Chris Wilson himself.

"What's the idea?" Vi blazed, glaring around. "Want this guy to escape as he did last time? Let me finish the job! He's got to die!"

"Not at your hands, though, Vi," Chris insisted. "That's plain jungle law—and there are proper laws. You've got to obey them."

Welgand stood listening, rubbing his aching neck. He dropped his hand to the switchboard bench to support himself—and his hand dropped right on the girl's gun. Surprised he looked at it; then he whipped it up—but Vi was a second quicker seeing his action a shade sooner.

She ripped free of the now lax grip on her arms, bunched her right fist and drove it out like a piston rod. Even one of her feet left the floor with the terrific power she put behind it. It was the most astounding punch Chris had ever seen, and he'd seen plenty. Just as though she had blown everything in one vast colossal effort.

Welgand's head jerked back like a punch-bag. His teeth clicked loudly. He shot rather than toppled away from the group, crashed into the opposite wall with his mouth welling blood.

Like a rag doll he crumpled motionless to the floor.

“Whew, was that dynamite!” Chris whistled, as the girl stood shaking her hand painfully.

“Should have been,” she replied fervently. “I’ve broken three of my knuckles.”

The officer-in-charge went over to Welgand and studied him briefly. He got up and shrugged.

“Broken neck,” he said briefly. “Either the punch or else the switchboard.”

“But it was self-defense,” the girl said slowly. “It was not murder. He pulled a gun on us. Right?”

The officer nodded slowly, gave a grim smile. “Saved the Earth a job of work, Amazon. But you’d better watch yourself in future with those muscles of yours. May get you into trouble.”

“Not again,” she answered quietly. “That was probably my last big wallop. I’m all through fighting now Welgand’s washed-up. My next fights will be domestic—training these two kids of mine to become the forerunners of a super race.”

The officer smiled again as she picked the children up in her strong arms, petted them affectionately.

“Anyway,” he said, thinking, “that’ll be twenty years from now and I won’t be on the space force then. If they’re anything like their mother I’ll count that in my favor. But joking aside, Amazon, you’ve finished a masterly job. Good luck to you—in fact all four of you!”

When Mr. Ayre sent us this story from bomb-wracked London, he asked us what we thought of the idea of continuing the adventures of these two amazing children of the Golden Amazon. We leave it to you. Why not drop us a line and tell us what you think about it?—The Editors.

[The end of *The Golden Amazon Returns* by John Russell Fearn (as Thorton Ayre)]