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Invaders From Sirius

by **ED EARL REPP**

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THE
GOLDEN AMAZON

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre

First published *Fantastic Adventures*, July 1939.

*Violet Ray, mystery woman of space, comes to earth on an errand of destruction, and
Chris Wilson follows into the void, seeking revenge*

CHAPTER I

Mutiny—2040 A.D.

Commander Bedson stood in the control room of the Earth-Mars space liner with his technicians beside him.

“Red Tanner again, eh?” he asked the chief engineer grimly.

“Yessir. He’s making trouble in the rocket rooms and he’s got the men right with him. You know his line—better wages and conditions for the rocket men.”

“Better wages!” Bedson exclaimed in exasperation. “My God, does the fool think I run the damned service? We all want better wages—but when a service is only at the beginning it can’t pay much. We are just the pioneers, so we’ve got to put up with it . . .”

“Trouble is, trying to pacify him,” the chief engineer muttered.

“You’ve *got* to pacify him, Mr. Dutton!” the Commander snapped. “We can’t afford to have trouble below. We’ve passengers to think of, and that special supply of Saturnian bacteria for analysis by the Martian laboratories. With cargo like that aboard—” Bedson broke off and took a deep breath, stared through the port with his hawkish eyes. “Besides, right now we’re dangerously close to the Venusian gravity-field. The slightest error in power might wreck the ship. Get below, Mr. Dutton, and keep strict order at all costs.”

“I’ll do my best, sir.”

The engineer turned to the door, then he paused as it flew open under the force of a mighty kick. Red Tanner, the source of all the trouble, stood on the threshold, a flat metal flask clutched in his hand.

“Drinking again, eh?” Dutton breathed. “Now I get it! No wonder you’re all burned up! Put that damned elephant-juice away, Red, and get back to work—”

“Aw, shut up!” Tanner broke in sourly. He levered his vast bulk into the control room and stood among the officers, swaying on his feet. In size he was colossal—a six-foot-six giant of a man, nearly naked, covered in the soot of rocket exhaust, sweating, damp hair trailing down his powerful, ugly face.

“Listen, you . . . !” He faced Commander Bedson and eyed him narrowly. “I want my rights, like the rest of the guys below. They’re all with me—hundred percent. See? We’re about through with struggling down there in heat and light gravity for a schoolkid’s money! I’ve got a wife and baby daughter to keep at home. How the hell am I expected to do it on the wages I get?”

“You knew the rate of pay when you took on,” Bedson snapped. “Back to work! Else you’ll go back to prison where you came from!”

“Not on your life!” Red growled, flinging his flask in the corner of the cabin. “I want results from you—and the lily-white higher ups who’re making all the sugar out of this racket. What do we get? Just plain nothin’, and food that ain’t fit for a Martian desert lizard . . . We drink—Yeah, we drink, to get some sweat under our rotten hides so we can go on working—for the likes o’ you! But it’s goin’ to end! And it’s goin’ to end now. See?”

Commander Bedson stood with his feet apart and his hands behind him, eyeing Red Tanner gravely.

“Red, either you get below or I’ll have you clapped in irons. You’ve one more chance—Get moving!”

“All I want are results!” Red breathed, his gray eyes gleaming. “I want you to sign a statement saying the conditions are rotten for us; I want you to try and get us better pay—”

“I can’t do it. That’s for the Board to decide.”

“You mean you *won’t!*” Red bellowed suddenly. “You’re too afraid of your own job, that’s why! By God, give me one chance to get even with the higher-ups! One chance is all I ask— And I’m making a start right now!”

He swung to the doorway again. “O. K., boys!” he roared. “Come and get it!”

He twisted back again into the control room, slammed out his mighty fist with terrific power. It caught the Commander under the jaw and sent him flying into unconsciousness before he had the chance to realize what had happened.

In dazed horror Engineer Dutton suddenly knew what had occurred. The rest of the men must have followed Red up from the rocket-rooms, had waited the outcome of the meeting before striking. And now—? Down there in the nerve-center of the ship there was nobody in control, nobody to fire the blasts against Venus’ decisive tuggings.

“Wait!” Dutton screamed. “Wait, you fools! It means death for the lot of us if—”

He went down with a blinding light before his eyes. Red stood over him, separated from the rest of the battle for a moment.

“Hell, but I wish you were that dirty rotten skunk of a brother of mine—” he whispered. “How I’d like to sock him like I socked you!”

He swung, fists clenched again, as an officer charged for him. Wild pandemonium descended on the control room— The noise of it spread through the entire mass of the great vessel.

In the dining room the Venusian pull was evident. The ship was tilted sideways, hurling crockery, tables and people to one side with earthquake effectiveness. Mirrors splintered, women screamed, the pianist died at the grand piano as it slammed into his stomach.

Richard Ray jumped up shaking scalding soup from his trousers; then he clutched his frightened wife, Joyce, to safety in the nick of time as an electrolier came hurtling down in a thousand razor-edged shards.

“A wreck!” screamed a voice. “We’re falling toward Venus!”

“Man the escape ships!”

“The baby!” Joyce cried in sudden horror. Then with her husband beside her she turned and blundered with mad desperation through a darkened confusion of people that was smeared with starlight, Venuslight, and spurts of flame as electric wires fused against wooden paneling.

Somehow the two staggered up the jammed staircase to their cabin, snatched up the precious bundle from its cot and raced outside again. They clung to each other, fighting through the panic-stricken mob, jostled, and scratched, until suddenly they stopped in a dazzling flood of blinding spotlight.

An officer was visible, ray pistol in hand, standing at the airlock of a safety vessel.

“Women and children first!” he bellowed. “The first man that tries to pass this doorway will be shot down. . . . Quickly, please!”

Joyce hesitated for a moment, then she found herself pushed forward by Dick. She caught a glimpse of his tragic eyes staring after her, then he was lost in the crowd. Helplessly, her precious bundle clutched to her breast, she plunged through the airlock into the dim interior.

The rest was a mad nightmare to her. Women upon women seemed to pile on top of her. In vain the pilot cried out that there was no room. . . . He had to have space to work the rocket-

tubes—

With a terrific effort Joyce did the only thing possible with the baby, raised her arms over her head and held it free of the press that hemmed her in with ever tightening force. . . . She felt the ship jolt into space at last, lost all feeling in her numb, anguished arms. From the midst of a half-faint she could hear frantic shouts.

“I must have room to control! *I must have room!*”

“My God, we’re falling— *Falling!*”

Joyce heard no more than that. Unbearable pressures beat round her heart and lungs. Darkness swamped in upon her in a vast roaring tide. . . .

CHAPTER II

Twenty Years After

Chris Wilson was rather proud of his position as Acting Superintendent of the New York Lunar Observatory. For five years now he had ruled over the staff of this unique building in the very heart of New York, admiring and admired by his staff. The main object of the place was to chart a titanic map of the moon from some seven million separate three-dimensional photographs, a task which demanded perpetual nightly accuracy at the controls of the monstrous photographic reflector in the building's summit.

More often than not Chris worked the reflector alone, sitting, a shock-haired, broad shouldered figure in the center of the controlling machinery, his fingers playing on an apparatus resembling a typewriter keyboard which controlled the mammoth so close to him.

In a way it was monotonous, but interesting. At least it was a life job, and that in the frantic, haste-mad world of 2060 was worth having. . . .

On this night of January 7 Chris sat as usual under the vast glassite dome of the building's lofty summit, hands idle in front of the keyboard, his dark eyes glancing ever and again from the monstrous telescope to the floodlit beacon towers of New York City. . . . The whole metropolis was spread out below him, a crazy jigsaw pattern of a million lights and shadows. To the scrambling hordes down there the moon was just a useful adjunct to a dark night: to him it was his life.

With a faint smile on his generously planned face he glanced toward the faint flush on the eastern horizon. Moonrise was due in half an hour. He sat back to wait, his controls all ready to begin the usual night's work. In those few moments of relaxation he thought of many things

The busy workers in the rooms below the observatory, for instance, all engaged on this one lunar task; then he thought of the girl who had just left him after a surprise visit—Dorothy Rennat, the girl he hoped to shortly make his wife—a slim, rather timid blonde and the niece of Alva Rennat, the space-way magnate who had been directly responsible for financing this Lunar Observatory.

Chris smiled as he thought of them both. He knew exactly what they would be doing this evening after dinner—playing *Martian Bridge* in the girl's uptown apartment. *Martian Bridge* had a weird fascination all its own. . . . Chris had no time for such things. His life was bound up with maps, scientific interests, interviews with spacemen to check the details of Lunar points of interest. He took a vast interest in the spaceways, smiled as he thought of the antiquated mutineering ships of twenty years before.

He glanced up suddenly as the flush in the east deepened. At the same moment his eye caught sight of a glittering space machine, amazingly fast and amazingly small, hurtling dangerously near his glassite dome. For a second he held his breath in frozen expectation of a crash—then the little bug had scorched into the night with a roar of its tubes.

"Crazy fool. . . ." he muttered; but something was sticking in his mind. He had seen the name *Ultra* on that ship for a flashing instant. He frowned, remembered he had heard the name before in connection with a mysterious woman of the spaceways. Some called her a criminal, others a goddess—but all called her "The Golden Amazon. . . ."

“Wonder why?” he mused; then with a shrug he turned back to his control panel, poised his fingers ready to maneuver the reflector into place. A faint sound reached him as he waited, but necessity demanded all his attention on the telescope—at least upon the hair-lined sights that piloted the thing.

He sat rigid, eyes fixed on the guiders—yet through the time he sat there he was aware of further strange noises. A faint creak finally forced him to look up impatiently.

“Get out of that chair—immediately!” commanded a voice from behind.

Utterly astounded he stared at the emergency exit doorway to the roof. It was swinging wide now, its lock blasted away with soundless fire. On the threshold, silhouetted against the night outside, was a girl. Perhaps she was five feet eight tall, clad in brief shorts and sleeveless garment of some shimmering substance, while upon her feet were perfect fitting skin sandals.

Such a vision, against the stinging cold of the night, was next door to incredible. For several seconds Chris could not speak. He sat drinking in the girl’s flawless form, the curious golden tinge of her satiny skin, the cobalt-blue of her short, waving hair. Her eyes, startlingly vivid against the gilded tint of her face, were deepest violet.

“Well, how much longer are you going to be?” she asked abruptly, waving the gun she held in her hand. “Come here! Quick!”

Chris got slowly to his feet, eyeing her steadily as he went forward. He caught a glimpse of a small space machine on the roof outside, the name *Ultra* on its prow.

“So you’re the one they call the Golden Amazon?” he asked shortly.

She nodded her blue-black head slowly. “I believe they call me that, yes. My real name is Violet Ray, if you must know— But never mind that! Right now you’re going to do as I say. Come here . . .”

Chris gave a faint smile—then with a sudden vast leap he hurled himself forward, his powerful hands closing round the girl’s wrists. Grimly he forced her backwards— Then he got the shock of his life. Her gun dropped, yes, as he had intended; but she recovered herself instantly. Like an uncoiled spring she straightened up, tore herself out of his clutch and closed fingers of steel round his left elbow and right knee. Before he could realize what was happening he was flying through the air like a sack of coals, landed dazed and bewildered a few feet from the *Ultra*.

“Hell . . .” he breathed uncertainly, shaking his head violently. That had been no ju-jitsu trick; just plain superhuman strength. He glanced up to find the girl standing over him, her gun back in her hand.

“Better take it easy,” she advised quietly. “Get in that ship—and I’m not fooling, either.”

“Golden Amazon is right,” he muttered, scrambling up; then before he could speak again a shove of a golden arm sent him spinning into the ship’s control room. The girl followed him up, slammed the airlock and seated herself at the controls.

“Just what is this? A snatch?” Chris asked bluntly.

“Keep quiet and watch!” the girl retorted.

From sheer interest he did as bid. He stood gazing down on the shining glassite hemisphere of the observatory as the girl set the *Ultra* circling over it with consummate ease. Then she pulled out a switch, sat watching with her beautiful face set in determined lines as something dropped from a trap in the bottom of the ship and hurtled downward.

Chris gazed in stony horror, appalled as he saw the whole mass of the observatory below go mushrooming outward in the smother of an explosion. Clearly the object had been an atomic bomb of devastating power. By the time the dust had settled there was nothing left on top of the building, nothing but ashes and crumbled metal girders.

“You—you devil!” he gasped out abruptly, wheeling round with a livid face. “You destroyed the reflector, my work, everything that—”

“Nobody was hurt and the *arium* floor of the observatory would save the workers in the lower quarters from injury,” Violet Ray replied, her blue eyes gleaming strangely. “I had to destroy that observatory tonight . . . And I just managed it,” she finished, gazing out toward the rising moon.

“But—but why?” Chris yelled. “It was wanton destruction! By God, those people who call you a spacial criminal are dead right! There was no need for that—!”

“There was every need,” the girl cut in; then with a contemptuous glance, “You don’t need to worry. I don’t want you. I only brought you along to save you getting hurt . . . I’ll return you to the city center.”

Chris hesitated on saying something as she turned back to the controls. His eyes went up and down her magnificent figure, the round smoothness of her supple bare arms and shoulders. There was a pliance and hidden strength in that form such as he had never known. He wondered how she endured the intense cold of a January night in such scanty attire.

“I’ve heard a lot about you,” he said at last, trying to forget the incident of the observatory for the moment. “You’re a criminal who works solo, aren’t you? A mystery woman?”

“There are various accounts of me . . .” The girl dipped the ship toward the light spotted haze of the city center.

“The name of Violet Ray is of course assumed?”

“No. My father was Richard Ray and my mother Joyce Ray. They both died in a space wreck twenty years ago . . . Most people know that.”

“I didn’t.”

The girl glanced up momentarily. “Well, you do now! Venusian Hotlanders found me alive when I was a baby. They took care of me. I grew up in the environment of Venus, and for reasons which I may one day explain, that environment did things to me. It made me utterly unlike any other woman—both in strength and intelligence. From ship’s records I found my name entered in the passenger list as Violet . . . The original ship crashed on Venus, of course. I spent years in learning, helped by a super-keen intelligence. I modeled a space machine like the small safety ships that had dropped to Venus. To match my name I called my ship the *Ultra*—”

She broke off, adjusted the controls. “But I’ve no more time now. This is where we part.”

As the ship finally settled Chris turned to the airlock and opened it. He could not make up his mind whether to love or hate this amazing girl with the contemptuous manner and the mysterious past. She decided the issue for him by bringing out her gun.

“Outside quickly. I don’t want mechanics coming round. . . .”

Chris stepped outside to the floodlit expanse of metal landing park.

“Wherever you see the name *Ultra* you’ll find me,” she said softly, looking down at him with her fascinating eyes. “I’m glad to have met up with you—Chris Wilson . . .”

“Then you know my name—!”

Chris broke off. The airlock had closed adamantly. He stood in perplexed silence, watching as the little but incredibly fast ship hurtled to the upper heights in a flare of sparks.

Then it was lost to sight in the dark.

For a long minute he stood pondering, the memory of the girl swamping his mind—then his thoughts drifted back to the commonplace and the thing she had done. His jaw hardened.

Alva Rennat must be notified immediately of course. He turned and set off for the main city traffic ways, boarded a tube express for the residential quarters.

Alva Rennat was playing Martian Bridge with Dorothy at the girl's apartment when Chris broke in.

"Mr. Rennat, we've work to do! The observatory's been blown up—and I've had a brush with that woman who's called the Golden Amazon, otherwise Violet Ray!"

"What!" Rennat shot to his feet, overturning the table in his excitement. He was a ponderous man, triple chinned, beady-eyed, and as bald as a stratosphere globe.

"Violet Ray!" Dorothy cried, twisting round in her chair so suddenly that her ash-blonde hair tumbled over her eager, sympathetically beautiful face. "Oh, Chris, what's she like? I've heard of her of course and— Is she beautiful?"

"Yeah," Chris acknowledged briefly; then he shook the girl's slim, restraining hand away. "I've no time for explanations now, Dot. What we've got to do, sir," he went on, glancing at the big man, "is to get down to Law headquarters and have this girl picked up! Her action was deliberate . . ."

"Confounded meddling busybody!" Rennat snorted, scrambling into his overcoat. "I'll settle her! Come on!"

At the door Chris hesitated a moment, seeing Dorothy's crestfallen look.

"Sorry," he smiled, patting her arm. "I guess you're interested in this dame as one woman to another, but— Tell you later. No hard feelings?"

She smiled, winked a blue eye mischievously. "No, of course not. Only I would like to know more of this girl. Being a bit of a hothouse plant myself, I—"

"Later," Chris promised, then he dashed out into the corridor in pursuit of Alva Rennat's bass boomings for an uptown express conveyance.

In the depths of the fast taxi Rennat simmered like a geyser.

"Blasted piracy!" he grated. "Damned scandal to the Twenty First Century! What are the space police for, anyway? Thousands of dollars gone up in smoke! *My* dollars! I financed the whole thing, remember!" He turned suddenly with beady eyes glittering. "And why the heck didn't you stop her? You're husky enough!"

"Not for her," Chris muttered, glancing out on the flying night lights. "She's like coiled wire—"

"She can't get away with it!" Rennat avowed firmly, and stared grimly ahead as they came to a street intersection.

Then something happened. Chris Wilson could never figure out exactly what. For instead of the street there was a sudden blinding sheet of blue flame and volumes of choking smoke. The taxi wheeled round wildly and fell on its side. The frames of unbreakable glass buckled and split.

Alva Rennat fell in the midst of the riven metal and landed head downward, a metal bar driven through his jugular vein . . . The world swam before Chris' blurred eyes. He could vaguely understand that he was being dragged clear of the tangled wreckage. There were shouts and the scream of police sirens.

"A bomb!"

“Somebody threw a bomb!”

“You all right, sir?” The blur went from Chris’ vision and he found a police officer supporting him.

“Yeah, I think so, but—” Chris rubbed his head dazedly, glanced at the vision of the dead, blood-spattered Alva Rennat. He turned away, sickened.

“Back, please! Back!” commanded the police, forming a cordon.

Chris stood swaying on his feet, his brain clearing by degrees. Somebody had tried to stop them from reaching Law headquarters—and nearly gotten away with it too! More of Violet Ray’s handiwork? Chris’ brain cleared suddenly as a chain of thoughts assumed crystal clearness—Dorothy! They might try and get her too!

He swung round and pushed his way through the eager knot of sightseers. After ten minutes of frantic running he gained the apartment building, jumped into the personal elevator and sent it whizzing up its suction tube. The instant he reached the girl’s door and received no answer to his thunderous hammerings he began to sense the worst. It did not take him two minutes to unearth the janitor and have him open the door with duplicate keys.

In the main living room both of them paused, their eyes automatically directed to the mirror over the electric fire. It contained one word executed in purple chalk—“Ultra!”

CHAPTER III

Pursuit to Venus

“Say, mister, what does that mean?” the janitor asked at last, pulling down his long underlip uncertainly.

“Plenty, I guess!” And Chris dived through into the neighboring bedroom, searched in every direction. There was no sign of Dorothy, nor of disorder—but it did strike him as significant that her outdoor clothes had vanished from the locker contrived for the purpose.

“Did you see Miss Rennat leave here during the last half hour?” Chris demanded, coming back to face the janitor.

“No, sir—can’t say as I have. I—”

“O.K., skip it. I think I’ve got something.” Chris was looking at the drawn-back catch of the window. He threw the sash open, twisted his head outside and stared at the fire-escape leading to the flat roof.

“Now I get it,” he breathed, withdrawing his head and flipping the janitor a coin. “Thanks a lot. . . .”

He dived outside to the phone booth in the corridor. Frantically he dialed the number of Space Headquarters. The voice of Grant Chambers, his most useful friend, came over the wire.

“Oh, hallo, Grant. This is Chris. . . . Look, I want some dope urgently. That Golden Amazon dame’s blown up the Lunar Observatory and then snatched my girl. She also got away with killing Alva Rennat, and nearly killed me. . . .”

“Holy Cats! What do you want me to do?”

“As I figure it she’s made a dash into space. Tell me what space ships have left in the last half hour. Some must have passed through the General barrier atop the Heaviside Layer. Was there a ship called *Ultra* among them?”

“Hang on; I’ll take a look at the record tapes.”

Chris stood drumming his fingers on the kiosk panel. Then the voice resumed.

“A ship called *Ultra* beat the police barrier at Heaviside and skipped through at the hell of a lick! Police pursued it for five hundred miles, but were hopelessly outdistanced. Anyway, five hundred miles is beyond the law limit and under no planet’s control. Ship was heading Venus way.”

“Right!” Chris’ dark eyes gleamed. “I’m going right after it! And you can do me a big favor, Grant. Tell the police at Heaviside that I’m following Golden Amazon and will go right through their barrier. I’ll carry the Free Light to warn them as I approach. You can fix that?”

“Sure! And good hunting!”

Chris slammed off, dashed to the elevator tube, and so down to street level again. A fast airbus carried him without delay to the space grounds. His official card as Superintendent of the Lunar Observatory did the rest. In ten minutes the mechanics had conducted him to a Zemi-Fletcher Express.^[1]

[1] The Zemi-Fletcher is a one-man space machine capable of terrific speeds and supplied with two guns, one long and one short range, for personal protection.—Author.

Chris slipped inside, sealed the airlock and sat before the familiar controls. One switch fired the *volcanite* fuel in the rockets; another, working in series, controlled each tube independently or collectively at will. . . . With a spurting of underjets he forced the machine into the sky at a pace that made the mechanics below gape in amazement.

Despite his frantic hurry Chris had to slacken off. The crushing acceleration was like a steel hawser round his chest. His chair creaked on its oiled springs; he felt as though he weighed a ton. Little lights danced before his eyes— Then he was easier again, achieved the very maximum possible for physical endurance, sat staring out through the forward window with keen eyes, his jaw set, every scrap of his being concentrated on catching sight of the small bus owned by Violet Ray.

He was through the successive layers of the atmosphere to Heaviside before he hardly realized it. A button switched on the red Free Light on the front of his machine. With devastating speed he went through the ranks of the police guard . . . but the way was clear for him. Grant had done the trick. There was just the courtesy salute, then they were far behind.

And so out into the depths of space—into the confusing wilderness of starlight, moonlight, and sunlight blazing through the ebon eternity of space. Somehow, the void never lost its supernal attraction.

Like a statue Chris sat at his controls, rear tubes still forcing against Earth's gravity field. He stared over the endless vault, at the variety of shipping floating around—heavy freighters, liners, old space tubs from outer planet mines, leisurely hospital and first aid craft, all with their different mark of classification.

In thirty minutes he had left them all behind and was heading in an almost straight line for the blazing orb of silver close by the sun—Venus. He knew that his one hope lay in catching Violet Ray before she got to that planet. Once upon its grim surface, with its Hotland jungles, its mud rivers, its awesome mountains, and there was no telling how he could ever find her, or Dorothy either.

He coaxed more speed from the machine and sat with his lungs bound up and perspiration pouring down his body. Time and again he went through this self-inflicted torture, relaxing only for brief periods. But space remained empty ahead of him; Violet Ray had had a good start. He used the robot pilot while he ate a meal and snatched a brief sleep—then he was back at his post.

Three times he ate and slept before he awoke to glimpse something in the black deeps ahead—a speck faintly visible to the naked eye against the blinding argent of Venus.

Instantly he turned to the telescopic sights and focused the thing. His heart gave a leap. Though he could not distinguish the name, there was no denying the shape of that bus; it was the *Ultra*.

He put on the power again and gave the ship all it had. By sheer will power and physical strength he hung on against the overwhelming urge to collapse under the strain. Supports governed the movement of his hands. His jaw lolled from its own weight. Blinding pressure hemmed in on his skull as he drove like a madman across the infinite. . . .

In twenty minutes he had made up hundreds of miles of leeway, drawn close enough to read the ship's name. From the flaring sparks it was pretty evident that Violet Ray had seen him and was suddenly determined to give him a run for his money. Her ship started to draw away with consummate ease. For one thing it was infinitely fast, and for another she was able,

by very reason of her strange physical constitution, to stand up to the onslaught of acceleration. How Dorothy fared did not matter, evidently.

Chris let out a vast oath as he began to fall behind. He looked round him desperately, then his eye caught sight of the long-distance energy gun. With colossal effort, the veins bulging on his forehead under the strain, he moved the gun round, sighted it on the steadily receding vessel. Savagely he closed the spark switch and an invisible pencil of energy stabbed over the gap. . . . To his infinite delight one of the *Ultra*'s rear rocket tubes crumbled into molten metal.

"Got you!" he yelled. "Chew that one over!"

As he had expected, the *Ultra* slowed down, its power halved. Within minutes his own terrific pace brought him alongside. Through the observation window he could see Violet Ray's grim, set face staring at him. He grinned at her across the void, snapped on the space radio.

"Guess you'd better stop before I blow all your tubes away!"

"Think so?" retorted the girl's laconic voice. "Play this over on your switchboard!"

Chris swung round with a start at a sudden terrific shattering impact from the wall of his ship. The plates flowed with fiendish heat, beat him back from them. Then just as suddenly the invisible energy shifted and he heard his rocket tubes go cracking to blazes one by one. His speed remained constant, since he was in free space, and the *Ultra* still kept level.

"Better put a space suit on!" Violet Ray's voice called. "I'm sending this one for luck!"

Chris watched in dazed horror as the airlock door began to turn red, then violet blue. In another moment it would be shattered— With a hoarse cry he scrambled into his space suit and spun on the helmet as the door crumbled into pure energy. The outward suction of air from the ship sent him spinning to the opening and out. He clutched the rended metal edge with his pincer gloves, saved himself, waved a fist over the infinite.

"Damn you!" he roared, and his chest microphone carried his words to the radio transmitter. "What kind of a hell-fired stunt do you call this? No tubes, no door— Give a guy a break, can't you?"

"Keep your shirt on," said the girl's voice. "I just chopped your ship up a bit to show you you can't bust tubes on the *Ultra* and get away with it. I'm not marooning you; I rather admire your courage, as a matter of fact. I'm coming alongside; switches will open the outer lock. Come into the control room. . . ."

He waited until the vessel was level, saw the outer door-shield slide to one side. Rather puzzled he passed through the triple locks, closing each one behind him. Violet Ray, a faintly amused smile on her beautiful face, regarded him from the control board as he trooped in.

"Sorry to knock you around, Chris Wilson, but you asked for it," she said, as he took off his helmet. "And now you have caught up with me what exactly do you want?"

"You know darned well what I want!" Chris snapped, seizing the girl's firm bare arm. "I want Dorothy Rennat! What was the idea of the snatch?"

The girl shook his hand away. "I don't like being pawed," she smiled; then after a brief silence, "I don't see any reason why I should answer your questions. After all, on board this ship you take orders, not give them. If you've any doubts just try and start something!"

Chris breathed hard down his nose. He wished the girl would stop smiling at him with her perfect teeth, wished she was not altogether so desirable. It made his task doubly difficult.

"At least tell me if Dorothy is aboard?" he asked stiffly.

"She's aboard." Violet Ray turned back to her controls.

“Why did you take her? Why did you try and kill me? You finished off Alva Rennat, so why not me? I can’t understand what you’re driving at. . . . I only know I wish you didn’t have to do such things.”

“Why?” she questioned, staring straight in front of her.

“Well, because. . . . Oh, be hanged to talking! Fetch out Dorothy. I want her to know she’s not left alone with a pirate, anyway. She gets scared easy.”

“So I’ve noticed. But I’m not going to fetch her yet; I can’t move from this seat. You know what it’s like when you’re in a gravity field; and right now my particular worry is Venus. Sit down there where I can keep my eye on you.”

Chris glanced at the interdoor leading to other sections of the ship, then at a commanding glance from the girl’s vivid eyes he sat down by the control board and watched her operate the switches, working on one set of tubes only. . . . The ship dipped suddenly out of the dark of space into the upper levels of the dense Venusian atmosphere. It screamed through it, burst at last onto the wild, eye-wrenching grandeur of color that was the Hotlands, flanked in the far distance by a mountain range, to the right of which lay a river of swift flowing mud.

“It’s a savage world, yet I love it,” Violet Ray whispered, her voice unusually quiet. “I know it all, Chris Wilson—inch for inch! Its trees, its twenty-seven-hour day of saturating heat, its tidal mud flows, its honeycombed mountains . . .”

She stopped talking suddenly, eyed it all speculatively, drove steadily onward over the tree tops. Then at last the ship began to sink gently into a verdure-ridden clearing. The *Ultra* came to a jarless halt.

With a sigh the girl got to her feet, flexed her supple arms, stretched her legs.

“Give me freedom instead of being cramped up in this thing. . . .”

“Tell me something,” Chris said, as she turned to the door. “Why have you come here to Venus and brought Dorothy with you?”

She eyed him levelly. “Sometimes, Chris Wilson, I think you deserve a medal as a human questionnaire! Why I’ve come here is my own business. I’ll send Dorothy in to you; I’ve a rocket tube to fix—thanks to you!”

Her eyes flashed at him as she went through the doorway. The massive portal closed after her. Chris got to his feet and fretted around moodily for some five minutes before the door reopened and a pale-faced, disheveled Dorothy came into the compartment, her blue eyes wide in expectancy.

“Chris!” she yelled thankfully, and flung herself into his extended arms. “Oh, Chris, thank Heaven you’re safe! I saw your ship catching up to us and I thought—I thought perhaps this Ray woman would kill you.”

“Where is she, by the way?” Chris glanced around quickly.

“She went out to mend a tube, or something—Chris, how did you know I’d been kidnaped?”

“Simple enough when that dame wrote ‘Ultra’ all over your drawing room mirror. I’ve bad news for you, Dot. Your uncle was killed by a bomb on the way to headquarters—and I only just escaped. I think Violet Ray was mixed up in it somewhere but I can’t be certain. . . .”

“Uncle—dead!” The girl stared in front of her in bewilderment for a moment or two. Chris fancied he detected a slight hardening of her mouth; then finally she gave a helpless shrug. “Well, there it is—and here are we—Lord knows what for! This woman came down the fire escape, told me to dress in outdoor clothes and follow her. So—so I did. I wonder what—”

“Say, do you smell something?” Chris broke in sharply, sniffing.

Dorothy elevated her nose. “Why, I— Yes, it’s gas!” she screamed. “Gas from this grating on the floor—” She pointed to her feet, at the vapors rising from between them. With a hoarse cry she stumbled toward the airlock, but her knees buckled beneath her and she sprawled her length on the floor.

Chris swung around, staggered toward her, but at that instant the choking fumes overpowered his lungs. He went down, gasping, blinded. . . .

CHAPTER IV

True Colors

Chris returned to his senses amidst the saturating but cloud-hidden glare of the Venusian sun. Heat beat around him in sickly waves, seemed to rise in a poisonous miasma from the lushy verdure on which he lay. He got up slowly, the effects of the gas clearing rapidly from his head. By his side, still under the influence, sprawled Dorothy. Gently he raised her, went to work with resuscitating movements and was rewarded at last as her eyelids fluttered open.

For a long minute she lay gazing round the clearing, turned at last in wonderment.

“We’re—we’re in the jungle!”

“How’d you guess?” Chris asked tartly, scrambling to his feet and dragging the girl to hers. “Sure we’re in the jungle—but why? Why did Violet Ray leave us in this mess? Nowhere to go, no guide, no food, no weapons—”

“But the forest hasn’t anything dangerous in it,” Dorothy broke in, examining her curiously designed wrist watch rather anxiously.

Chris looked at her sharply. “How do you know that? When did you see Venus before?”

“Eh? Oh—I’ve seen it. Toured around the whole system once. . . .”

“Hmmm . . .” Chris grunted, but he still eyed her. “When you’ve finished messing around with that wrist watch maybe you’ll help me think. . . .” He turned impatiently and stared at the gouged tracks where the *Ultra* had settled, then at the burned undergrowth that testified to the flame of its underjets upon departure. But why had Violet Ray done such a thing? He scratched his sweat-damp head in bewilderment.

“Wish I could figure that dame out,” he growled, pondering. “She doesn’t look like a murderess and criminal, and yet— Maybe her beauty puts a guy off his guard—”

“Oh, so you think she’s beautiful?” Dorothy demanded, coming up to him. “You think she’s even more interesting than I am?”

Chris didn’t answer. The girl’s outburst had rather astonished him.

“She’s just a freak,” Dorothy went on sulkily. “At least I’m a normal girl, and that’s more than she is! She told me several things about herself on the trip, before we saw your ship catching up on us.”

“What things?” Chris demanded keenly.

“Oh, scientific things about her physical powers. What was it, now? Oh, yes. She said that here on Venus cosmic rays are blocked by the succeeding layers of atmosphere, but solar radiations, due to the planet’s nearness to the sun, get through. The outcome, in the case of a flesh and blood creature like her, is steady anabolism.^[2] Instead of cells breaking down they build up to ever increasing toughness. Actual Venusians, reacting to a totally different set of radiations and not being flesh and blood, live and die naturally, as do Earth creatures on their own planet. . . .”

[2] Venus has an extra dense atmosphere probably made up of ionized layers, through which only the life-giving radiations of the sun can penetrate. Normally—on a world like Earth—rays of life *and* death penetrate to the surface. Scientists believe that solar radiations are necessary to increase of life. They also believe that cosmic rays are responsible for certain

weaknesses in physique, and for death. They cause ketabolism, or breakdown of cells.—Ed.

“So that’s why she’s so unique,” Chris mused. “And her intelligence will match it! Records of old books, the remains inside the space ship that fell to Venus at the time of the mutiny— She could pick up any language with her brains, and— You got plenty out of her, Dorothy!”

“She volunteered it—boasting of her strength.”

“Well, it may explain her physique and upbringing but it does not explain her motives or show us what we’re going to do now,” Chris sighed. “Any suggestions?”

“Only one. . . . Why not try the mountain range? It’s visible through the trees there— At least we might find water.”

“O. K. We might even be able to get our bearings for Hotlands City, though I doubt it. . . .”

They turned together, forced their way through the livid verdure, stumbled through lichenous undergrowth, stopping ever and again to recover from the exhaustion begotten of the crushing heat. Venusian life, most of it small, darted and squirmed around and away from them as they moved.

In two hours they forced their way to the foothills and had the jungle behind them. Here the air was somewhat cooler.

For a while Chris stood silent, contemplating the rubble and stone leading to the mighty mountain range ahead of them. He looked at the tidal river of mud two miles to the left. The whole scene was wild, gave little hope of civilization. Hotlands City might be a thousand miles away for all he could distinguish to the contrary. He began to curse Violet Ray and all her works under his breath.

“Well, what do we do?” he demanded at last, swinging round to the girl.

She started to say something, then stopped as a voice behind them broke in.

“You’ll walk! Both of you!”

Chris wheeled round, astounded. A man in white ducks had emerged from behind a spur of rock, gun in hand. He was dark, tanned nearly to black with Venusian radiation.

“What the hell—” Chris started to say, but the gun stopped him.

“Never mind the remarks, brother—just march! You too!” he added, glancing at the girl.

To Chris’ inward surprise she was apparently quite unafraid: in fact he could have sworn a faint smile of bitter triumph was pulling the corners of her red mouth. She began to walk steadily toward the mountain escarpment with Chris alongside her. At a command from the man in the rear they both stopped at the solid face of cliff.

Chris stared in dumbfounded silence as that seemingly solid mass opened down one half of its length, evidently operated by some concealed turntable switch in control of the man with the gun.

“Keep moving!” he snapped, coming up again.

Without a word they passed down a flight of floodlit steps out into the rock and so into a roomy cavern filled with shadowless light. Chris’ first impression was of twelve faces—hard, grim faces, belonging to men well past middle age. Most of the men were standing, but one was seated at a rough wood table—a giant of a man with the face of an old-time pugilist. Possibly he was fifty, possibly more.

“What the devil are you people doing here?” Chris snapped out at last, as the eyes regarded him steadily.

“You’ll find out quick enough,” said Dorothy briefly, then with an insolent smile at Chris’ astounded expression she went over languidly to the table. In that short walk her manner seemed to change utterly. Her frightened air had gone; her features were grimly set.

“Dot, what’s come over you? What—”

“Shut up, you, and listen!” snapped the man at the table, getting to his feet. He came forward, made a motion to the man with the gun in the rear. Chris felt his wrists suddenly pulled behind him and clamped together with steel manacles and link chain.

“What’s the idea?” he asked bitterly. “Some gag of Violet Ray’s I suppose?”

“Nope—I’ve no truck with that dame, young feller. I’m working on my own. . . . Tanner’s the name—Red Tanner. Ever heard of it?”

Chris shook his head. The man grinned faintly; then with a sudden scowl he swung round on Dorothy.

“What brought you to Venus, anyway? And with this guy?”

“Violet Ray brought the pair of us,” the girl responded. “We were stranded, and I didn’t intend cooling my heels out there. . . . So I used the wrist watch radio signal. I knew we were near this hide-out. . . . As I’d expected you sent Jerry out to find us. . . .”

Red Tanner clenched his fists. “You blasted little fool! You let the position of this hide-out be known with Violet Ray around somewhere maybe? It was a mad thing to do—”

“So you’re the big shot of the crime ring that’s been puzzling the Earth authorities?” Chris broke in savagely. “Guess I got you all wrong, Dot. . . . You’re a two-faced little hypocrite.”

“Take it easy!” Red Tanner growled “This girl’s my daughter. . . .”

“Daughter!”

“Yeah! Surprised? Listen, I’ll tell you a few things. Since you’re going to vanish from sight later it won’t matter. . . . I’m an ex-mutineer. See? Twenty years ago I landed on this blasted planet with a few of my buddies—here they are around me. We were stranded. I was a rocket-man in the early days—and why was I one? Because my brother, Alva Tanner, had me shipped off to jail on a false charge, and as was the custom in those days jail-birds could become rocket men if they had the nerve. I took that chance. I started a mutiny for better wages and pay—I lost. For twenty years I’ve been up and down the system, digging out a living. . . . I only wanted revenge on Alva.

“I heard about him, see? I heard he’d taken my daughter and given her a good education—I’ll say that much for him. He’d built a nice new observatory with money made through crooked deals. And I guess he was afraid of me coming back ’cos he switched his surname round to Rennat, which is ‘Tanner’ spelled backward. I spent a long time trying to figure out how to get my own back. . . .”

Red Tanner paused, slammed his fist on the table.

“I wanted a chance for power, see? I wanted to aim a blow at the peoples of Earth that would give me the chance to rule them if their numbers were demoralized enough to permit of it. I found that chance had come when my men and I happened one day on the remains of the old space ship left from the mutiny. . . . We came across the sealed case of Saturnian bacteria we’d been taking to Mars. Bacteria—multiplying at millions to the hour. Released, the things would wipe out nearly everybody in New York City in a day! But how to get ’em to Earth safely?

“That was a problem. We’d already started a crime ring between worlds having our headquarters here—but this bacteria job needed somebody quite innocent to put it over. Then

our New York worker found that my girl was engaged to a guy in charge of the Lunar Observatory my brother had built! Imagine that!”

“Well?” Chris snapped.

“It was easy. By degrees Dorothy was told the truth, brought here to Venus and—”

“I found out in many ways that Red was my father,” the girl said briefly. “I’d always disliked my uncle anyway, and I was more than willing to help father. I took the bacteria box to Earth and had it fitted with a selenium cell device. Nobody could risk being within a hundred miles of it when it opened—hence remote control. That night I called to see you at the Observatory I put the box in a corner of the mirror-plate. At moonrise the selenium cell would have operated and released the bacteria— The disease would have begun at the most appropriate spot—in the very building my uncle’s ill-gotten gains had built. I intended to depart the moment the plague began. . . .”

“You would have exposed me to *that*?” Chris grated out.

“Why not?” Dorothy asked stonily. “I only got engaged to you in the first place because you had a steady job and plenty of money. When I knew about father and his plans you were only a tool— My timidity was a pose, of course. . . . The real trouble was Violet Ray! She poked her nose in and upset the whole thing.”

“So I’ve heard!” Red Tanner breathed venomously. “She blew up the Observatory before the moon rose. How she knew I don’t know— Any more than I can figure out why she brought you to Venus, Dorothy. She must have had a *reason*. . . .”

“Then you were responsible for the taxi explosion?” Chris’ voice was level and cold.

The girl nodded as she lounged against the table. “Of course. The moment you and uncle had gone I foresaw trouble, phoned our New York agent. I didn’t expect him to be quite so drastic, but . . .”

“At least,” Chris said quietly, “I see you in your true colors, Dot. And unless I’m mistaken you’ll get nowhere with Violet Ray somewhere around. She’ll beat you to it. . . .” He broke off, smiled twistedly. “Funny thing, for awhile I suspected you might *be* Violet Ray!”

“I’m a woman, not a freak! And don’t be too sure she’ll get any place. We’ve got to find her, dad. For years now she’s been beating you to it and—”

“She’ll be found,” Red said obstinately. “And we’ll try other ways to get the mastery over peoples on Earth—” He broke off, looked at Chris malignantly. “As to you, wise guy, you’re going to disappear from sight—literally. Start walking!”

Chris stared at the gun in Tanner’s hand, then he set his jaw and walked across the cavern into a narrow, natural opening in the rocks. It led into a passage, finally ended at a chasm. From the depths came the faint sound of bubbling and swirling.

“Mud river, joining up with the main tidal flow,” explained Tanner’s grim voice. “I could shoot you, of course—but I might as well save my ray-gun charge and be rid of you just the same.”

Chris stood motionless, tugging futilely on the steel fetters about his wrists. Then he swung round, intent on a last desperate bid for liberty—but the iron knuckles of Red Tanner struck him clean between the eyes. Helpless, he toppled backward over the chasm edge, felt himself falling through emptiness—

He tried to measure seconds to eternity—then suddenly he was brought up short in his fall with a jar that shook the breath out of him. He felt himself lifted sideways, tumbled headlong into rubble and dust.

A strong hand jerked him to his feet. Faintly he could make out the outlines of a face framed in dark hair.

“Violet Ray!” he whispered incredulously. “You—you caught me as I fell?”

“Yes.” The way she said it it sounded the simplest thing in the world. “I overheard all that went on above. When a person knows Venus as I do lots of things can be done. . . . Come with me.”

“These handcuffs,” he said, turning his back to her.

He felt her fingers round his wrists, stood in awe as he felt the links of the connecting chain twist and bend under those more than human hands. Suddenly he was free.

“This way,” she breathed, catching his arm.

After some minutes they emerged at a lower level. Shafts of daylight seeping through the cavern roof revealed opposite to them a titanic rock, like a pointing finger, some two hundred feet high. Around it there squirted streams of liquid mud from the exterior.

“Down here we’re below river level,” the girl explained. “That rock there acts as a natural stopcock—but it’s on a balance. A little pushing will move it over. The river will sweep into the breach, and since it is at flood tide it will submerge this cavern here, rise up the shaft down which you were thrown and—”

“Trap the others?” Chris asked in a low voice.

“Yes!” Violet Ray’s face was as hard as agate. “You’re thinking it’s murder—but it isn’t. It’s justice— When you’ve lived on Venus as long as I have, battling every day with Nature in its crudest moods, you’ll learn to forget sentiment. . . . Those people up there will start again, with unpredictable results unless we strike first. . . . They’ll drown, because I’ve thrown their exit-rock switch out of action.”

Chris said nothing. There was a certain heartless streak in her that rather repulsed him at times. And yet, she was logical enough. He stood watching as she vaulted with consummate ease to the rock stepping stones in the midst of the sloppy mud on the cavern floor. He followed her with difficulty, stopped by her side finally immediately below that finger of rock.

“Any help?” he asked, shoving uselessly against the spire.

She did not answer, pushed him aside rather contemptuously. He stood gazing at her taut, shapely legs as she dug her heels in the shingle. The biceps on her arms and shoulders bulged visibly under the strain she suddenly threw upon herself. . . . But the rock moved! It swung very slightly from the perpendicular on a central axis.

Again Violet Ray shoved, and again, her mouth tight with effort—then the rock swung over its gravity-center. The weight of the mud river outside was sufficient to finish the job. It tore the rock off its pivot and a deluge came thundering into the cavern.

Chris found himself dashed from the shingle like a fly. Mud was in his eyes, his nostrils, his mouth. It was like swimming in treacle— Then a hand of steel was on his shirt collar. He felt himself dragged upwards, caught a glimpse of a mud-caked golden arm driving with irresistible force through the cloying, sticky mess. He was impelled outward against the current, held his breath as he was forced below the river at the cavern mouth . . . then up he came again with that hand still holding him.

He fought his way by his own efforts across the actual river, with the girl right beside him. He could see the vast flow sweeping inwards into the mountain breach, steadily rising even as he watched it. . . . Then at last he felt stones under his feet, floundered up onto the rubbly bank with the mud-plastered girl behind him.

For a moment or two she stood watching the flow, wiping the filth from her face.

"I rather think," she said slowly, "that the first link in the crime ring has snapped right here. . . . Ruthless perhaps—but necessary."

Chris caught her arm. "The first link!" he echoed. "You mean there are others?"

"Of course," she answered quietly. "Do you think that that brute of a Red Tanner was the *master* of the whole thing? Oh, no. If he said he was that was just his ego. The bacteria idea was planned by a far cleverer mind than his. Believe me, Chris, there is crime in all parts of the system and Red and his daughter were only spokes in the wheel. I don't know who is back of the troubles, who is trying to master the earth by various diabolical means—but I'll find out. One day . . ."

"Just how did you know about that bacteria attempt?" Chris asked.

"Simple enough," the girl shrugged, peeling mud from her hands. "I knew for a long time that Tanner was on Venus, and from the records of the original ship I knew that he was the original cause of the mutiny. Knowing Venus so well it was no effort for me to locate his hide-out. I had other ways of getting into his place; the mountain is honeycombed. I heard everything he ever had to say, that's why I know he's only a part of the crime ring and not the head of it. . . . Three times he tried to wipe me out, most unsuccessfully.

"Recently I was astonished to find that the case of bacteria had gone from the original ship. I knew Tanner must be responsible, and sure enough I finally overheard of his plans, of how his daughter was to fix them on the lunar phototelescope on a specified night. My only chance was to fly to Earth immediately and wreck the plot. I did—and the Observatory too. It was the surest way to blast the bacteria out of existence. I had to beat the moonrise . . . and I made it."

"I remember," Chris murmured. "But tell me, why did you bring Dot and me back here and allow us freedom? Knowing Dorothy was the crook she was, why didn't you wipe her out —"

"I kidnapped her from earth to stop her doing any more harm. I was too late to stop her phoning her New York agent; that had to take its chance. I felt somehow that you'd come through, and because I wanted you to follow us I wrote 'Ultra' on the mirror as a clue. . . ."

"Why did you want me to follow?"

"To find out for yourself about Dorothy. I knew no words of mine would ever convince you. She reacted as I had anticipated and gave the signal to the hide-out. . . . Naturally I was always near at hand. I overheard the plan to throw you down the shaft and was ready and waiting."

There was a long silence. The girl turned at last toward the jungle. Chris followed her thoughtfully.

"You are sure the only reason you left the clue for me to follow you was because of Dorothy?"

Violet Ray stopped, her eyes averted. "It was as good a reason as any," she murmured. "Better follow me; I'll return you to earth safely."

"But I don't want to go back to Earth. I've nothing to go for! And besides, some of the things that have happened have made me want to go on and on—to try and find the source of all the trouble that clutters up the system with piracy, crime, and threats of death."

The girl smiled faintly. "I do get lonely sometimes," she admitted, almost naively. "And there are so many things I have yet to do—things no ordinary woman could do. A partner

would be useful perhaps. . . .”

Chris seized her slim, strong hand. “I’m not going back to Earth—yet . . .” he said.

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