

THE GENIUS OF LANCELOT BIGGS BY NELSON S. BOND

JUNE
20c

Fantastic

ADVENTURES

SEE
BACK
COVER

**DR. DESTINY
MASTER OF
THE DEAD**

BY
Robert Moore Williams



**GREAT STORIES BY MAURICE DUCLOS
★ ROSS ROCKLYNNE ★ THORNTON AYRE ★**

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 6

FANTASTIC
ADVENTURES

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The Amazon Fights Again

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Fantastic Adventures*, June 1940.

Chris Wilson and the Golden Amazon found themselves in serious trouble on Venus when Vi's supernatural strength suddenly deserted her

CHAPTER I

“Folks, there is a simply terrific reception here tonight—and well there ought to be! Thanks to the activities of Violet Ray and Chris Wilson, a bacteria plague has been stamped out. Maybe it wasn’t the end of crime in a big way, but it sure was a swell help.

“Least we can do is thank the newly married couple for the work they did. . . .

“Flash! The banquet has started. The president of American Science Headquarters is giving his vote of thanks right now. Hang onto your visiplates, folks, while we look them over in a close-up shot.”

Practically every watching eye in America surveyed the mirrored scene of a vastly long table. Telescopic eyes on the television transmitters moved up to short focus, to reveal the sensitive, clean-cut features of the Earth-born, Venus-reared girl whom all the world and the solar system called “the Golden Amazon.”

Every detail of the girl’s burnished, tawny skin, black hair and intensely dark blue eyes showed on the countless visiplates. Beside her sat the dark-haired, thoughtful-eyed young man who had finally won her heart—Chris Wilson, the ex-lunar surveyor and now adventurer-at-large.

Finally the president of American Science Headquarters got to the end of his fervid oration. Dramatically he raised his glass.

“To Violet Ray—or rather, Wilson,” he added heartily. Vi and Chris had just been married.

The toast was drunk by the tremendous assembly of men and women scientists and public figures—then all eyes swung to the girl.

Vi got to her feet, the picture of embarrassment.

“Unaccustomed as I am—” she began, and then her amber-tinted cheeks flushed very red indeed. She started again.

“Laymen and gentlies . . .” The distinguished crowd started to titter, and then everybody began to applaud and chuckle in good-natured fun.

Vi looked like a one-girl tableau of beauty in distress. She glanced appealingly at Chris and then sank limply into her chair. Crime Vi could stand up to—but speeches!

Chris, grinning hugely, got to his feet.

“I am afraid, my good friends, that my pretty but two-fisted young wife is not much of a woodsman—when it comes to splitting infinitives!”

Everybody held his breath for a moment, and then there was a mounting chorus of sheepish laughs as the pun went home.

“But seriously, friends,” Chris resumed, “although you are honoring us tonight for our efforts in smashing a vicious crime ring, let me remind you that this ring has been attacked at only one point. The rest of this brutal gang is still in existence.

“In this year 2060, when the marvels of science are seemingly without end, let us remember that unscrupulous forces are unquestionably at work to rob us of the fruits of our genius. Against such criminals, Vi and I pledge ourselves to continue the battle until the last vestiges of crime have been wiped out! We thank you.”

Chris made Vi rise and take a bow as the room rang with cheers.

Then the banquet began in earnest. From the sounds that rose from the tables, it was painfully obvious that the Science president’s lengthy speech had made a lot of folks go

hungry. After the mad clatter of cutlery had finally begun to subside, Dr. Grant Murray, sitting opposite Vi and Chris, wiped his sleek jowls with his napkin and grunted with paunchy contentment.

“Ahem!” The famous American scientist tossed back his gray mane by way of introduction. “Mrs. Wilson, permit me to say that your exploits have given me a great deal of confidence. Harrumph, confidence!”

“Indeed, Dr. Murray?” Chris said politely when Vi looked quite blank.

“Ahem, confidence!” the noted savant belched for the third time. “You see, for some time I’ve been working on an invention which creates a fire from a distance. But up to now I have been afraid to reveal even a single detail about the formula, for fear that it might—harrumph!—get into the wrong hands. Consequently I have kept my workshop a secret.”

“Indeed?” Chris repeated, a little bewildered.

“Ahem, criminals!” Dr. Murray said. “Ah—you might be interested to know that I utilize specified vibratory wavelengths and project them over an electro-magnetic beam. The atoms of whatever the vibration contacts are immediately excited. The process can be applied to steel, wood, in fact any element at all.

“However, apart from its uses for tunneling, boring, mining and so forth, this machine is potentially very dangerous. If criminals should—”

The lights went out. Everybody stopped talking at once. Then chairs began to bang, plates to rattle—and there was a splintering of glass at one of the windows.

“Trouble ahead!” Vi breathed, standing beside Chris.

“We might have known,” Chris agreed, “what with Murray’s new invention—”

The words were startled out of his mouth as the lights suddenly flashed on. People began to blink and get their eyes focused. Everyone looked a bit foolish.

Then—“Somebody has been tampering with the switches!” the Science president exclaimed. “That was no accident—”

A buxom dowager, wife of one of the savants, began to shout hysterically,

“Help! Police! *Dr. Murray’s gone!*”

Even as she screamed, Chris and the girl, who had noticed the scientist’s disappearance seconds before, were at the window which had shattered. A huge gap showed.

“There!” Chris shouted, pointing. “That man on the next roof! He’s carrying somebody—”

“Not if I can catch him,” Vi said tersely. Jumping to the window ledge, she eased herself through the broken glass, dropped to the flat roof-top and hurried toward the parapet, Chris close at her heels.

There was a sudden interruption. “Hey, there, hold on!” came a hoarse shout. “This is a police job. You can’t—”

Vi glanced back, her eyes narrowing. It was Chief of Police Welgand, and he was a study in official wrath.

“Take it easy, Chief!” she called back impishly. “You’ll live longer.”

At the parapet the girl halted abruptly. There was a fifteen-foot chasm between it and the adjoining roof.

“Vi, this is a police matter!” Chris panted behind her. “It’s an awful long drop”—he pointed streetward to little dots that were pedestrians—“down there!”

“I hope not,” the girl muttered. She smiled naively. “Chris, I’ve got to have some action! I’m the Golden Amazon—not a gin-bred debutante.”

Swiftly she tore away the gown she was wearing, to stand revealed in the brief tunic she invariably wore.

“You’ll never be a lady!” Chris groaned.

“I don’t think so, either,” Vi grinned. Then she leaped to the parapet, poised for a moment, and took off. The jump sent her to the opposite roof with ease—across a two-thousand foot drop.

Chris bit his lip, moved back, then made a similar effort. But it was only an effort. He sprawled half on and half off the opposite parapet and hung there desperately, until the girl grabbed him by the collar and hoisted away.

“This is a woman’s job,” she chuckled a little grimly.

“Well, I’m no female kangaroo!” Chris spluttered.

Dodging and twisting, the two of them went racing after the kidnaper. But whoever it was had too good a head start. The pair of them brought up abruptly when their ears rang with the roar of discharged powder and a screaming rocket ship tore upward into the starry sky, a trail of coruscating sparks in its wake.

Chris mopped his face and said something he hoped Vi didn’t hear.

“Well, General Barrier at Heaviside Layer will stop ’em! Let’s get to the radio, quick!”

The girl watched the rocket sparks wink out, a frown on her pretty face.

“Come on! If they get Murray to confess all about that invention of his, it’ll be just too bad!”

She turned and led the way back over the roof at desperate speed. They finally descended to ground level. Ten minutes of dodging in and out side roads brought them to the grounds where the girl’s own super-fast space machine, the *Ultra*, stood parked. She motioned to Chris and he flipped the parking check ticket to the waiting robot.

Vi dropped into the driving seat and Chris slammed the airlock. Expertly the girl closed the switches. In a long curving arc the *Ultra* lifted into the clear sky, rose high over the bowl of lights that was the night-twinkling city.

“Contact General Barrier,” the girl said after a bit. “Make yourself useful for once.”

“Hell! I almost forgot what we came for.”

Chris switched on the radio telephone. He waited impatiently, then snapped,

“Hello, Grant! Chris Wilson. If a ship of normal class goes through General Barrier atop Heaviside in the next five minutes, stop it! It— What! Gone through already? Damn! Okay, Grant.”

“Oh, dear,” the girl said softly. “Now we’ll have to go all the way after them.”

Chris glared at her. “Always pulling fast ones, aren’t you?”

“Now listen, Chris!” The girl faced him, her violet eyes bright and eager. “Get it through your civilized skull that because I have muscles, it doesn’t say my brain’s wrapped in ’em as well. I’ve got wits, same as you—only I’m not as sentimental.

“I know what criminals will do to get scientific secrets—and I fight them with their own weapons, strength, ingenuity, ruthless force if need be. I haven’t lived twenty years in the wilds of Venus for nothing!”

She turned back to the controls, her face set. Chris patted her satiny shoulder gently.

“Sorry, Vi. Guess I was rather a heel at that.”

“Glad you realize it! I’m not such a barbarian I don’t feel things like that. And don’t stand there doing nothing—we’re at General Barrier. Flash the all-clear signal!”

He obeyed dutifully. The ship shot through the Barrier and the whole void yawned ahead, star-dusted, complete. The girl sat back a little in her chair. For a moment or two she sat pondering, then Chris gave a sudden cry and swung around.

“There they are! Look—right ahead!”

Vi started. “What? Oh!” She gazed through the outlook port as Chris glanced at her in surprise.

“Say, what are they doing?” she asked abruptly. “They’re firing something from the rear gun to be sure it falls free of their gravity— Why, it’s a body!” she finished, horrified.

Chris turned to the telescope, adjusted it swiftly. He and the girl stared into the mirror.

“Body, all right,” he assented grimly. “Without a space suit. Burst and bloated to hell. The devils must have blown air into him before putting him outside. Do you think it’s—”

“It’s Dr. Murray,” the girl said, her keen face set and hard.

“I’m afraid you’re right.”

Vi stared after the ship, then began to cut the *Ultra’s* power down as the floating corpse came within reach, frozen into a gray mummy with the incredible cold of space. The first bloating had gone now; no trace of it remained except the scars. But there was no gainsaying but what the corpse in the deeps was Dr. Grant Murray. Certain definite facial lines were unmistakable.

“Fiends!” Vi whispered, clenching her fists. “Inhuman fiends, Chris!”

She caught his arm, forced him to look into her flushed, angry face.

“Now do you understand what I meant?” she demanded. “Do you think *now* that I fly out into space just on *any* pretext? No! These criminals are without mercy. The same mind that conceived the idea of mastering a world by bacteria plague is at work again—this time with fire! Obviously they forced Murray to reveal his great invention, then dumped him out in space.”

Chris glanced through the window. “Unless I’m mistaken, they are heading for Venus.”

“Exactly.” The girl gazed with him for a moment. “They hope to give me the slip at Venus—but they won’t!” She smiled bitterly. “Once on Venus and they’re at my mercy!”

CHAPTER II

Doublecrossed

Thereafter the girl left most of the driving to the robot control. She kept to her original plan of just keeping the fugitive machine in sight, and after each rest period surveyed it intently.

At long last the fugitive plunged into the eternal cloud banks swirling about Venus.

Fingers on the switches, Vi drove the *Ultra* down with dizzying speed through the blanketing mists, to burst suddenly upon the wild and flaming verdure of the Hotlands spread out like a patchwork quilt of many colors. In every direction stretched the giant forests of Venus, shooting in most places from sheer mud.

"They've slipped us," Chris snapped, staring ahead.

"They're out of sight, sure," the girl admitted. "But that doesn't hide them from me, Chris. I have friends here."

Chris held his breath as with unerring accuracy the girl sent the ship twisting and diving, swept through a clear spot between the trees and down into a clearing. The ship landed with a thud.

Vi sprang to her feet, slipped a ray gun into her belt and flipped one to Chris. Then she opened the airlock to Venus' sickly, enervating warmth.

"Come on," she said briefly.

"But—where?" Chris stared outside. "Sheer mud out there. We'll sink—and the ship, too, before long."

She smiled. "I know this planet as well as you know your Earth—a darned sight better, perhaps. You'll have to trust my judgment from now on."

"All right—I'll be the fall guy once again. Let's go!" Chris flung himself outside irritably, and instantly went to his knees in mud.

"Hey!" he yelled in alarm. "Hey, gimme a hand!"

It did not improve his temper when the girl started laughing at him. He watched her balefully as she jumped out beside him—but onto solid ground, to his surprise. Her supple arms hooked beneath his own and hauled him free. Muttering to himself, he shook the clinging mud from his gum boots.

"Wise guy!" the girl said laconically. "Serves you right for going off in a temper! This is a checkerboard clearing—half false ground and half normal. You can tell the solid parts by the lighter color. *That* is why the ship does not sink! Now—watch me and follow."

She set the example by making lithe leaps from pale square to pale square. Chris studied her technique for a moment, then followed her, and so into dense virgin jungle. They went on for awhile through a hopeless tangle of magenta vines, stirring up a myriad life forms that squawked and chattered wildly at their approach. Heat, crushing and relentless, beat down like a branding iron.

"Are you *sure* all this is right?" Chris groaned at length, wiping the pouring perspiration from his face. "They wouldn't come anywhere near here, surely? They've probably gone off into space again by now."

"No. They'd have to stop about an hour to let the rockets cool off a bit. Wherever they have gone, there is one certain way of finding them: the Hotlanders will tell me everything.

They're always roaming about the forest."

"Hotlanders?" Chris ruminated. "Oh, the things that brought you up!"

He stopped and winced as the girl let forth a piercing, strident whistle. It went reverberating through the fastness. After a bit there came an answering whistle.

Vi nodded complacently. "They'll come. I told you I had friends here. Sit down—you look all in." She eyed his sweating face with a faint hint of contempt.

"I'll stand," he snapped. "Because your skin remains cool as an icebox, that's no reason to make a fool out of me!"

Vi shrugged and leaned idly against a tree. Then after perhaps five minutes, Chris started at the vision of a most incredible being coming into the clearing. It reminded him of a giant pelican, half fish and half animal, with protruding eyes set in bony sockets. Its feet were webbed, its arms powerful flippers. Yet despite its extraordinary size—for it was possibly eight feet tall—it looked docile.

The girl, her slender form dwarfed by the giant, raced forward eagerly. Instantly a flipper curved round her waist and lifted her up lightly. Chris stood watching uneasily, noting for the first time the appalling claws the thing possessed. A rip from those claws could tear a human being in two.

"Hey, Vi, is this wise?" he demanded, cocking his ray gun.

"Wise? When they brought me up?" She gave an amused laugh, then turned and, pressing her face close to the thing's bullet head, started talking in a high-pitched jabber that finally brought forth from the thing a voluble answer in the same key. Finally the girl nodded and was gently lowered to the ground again.

"The ship landed in Ray's Clearing," she said quickly, coming up. "I rather figured that. That's where the space ship fell twenty years ago after the mutiny that killed Mother and Dad, and incidentally landed me on this planet."

She shrugged. "Well, come on. Delikus and others of the tribe saw our quarry head direct to Ray's Clearing."

"Damned considerate of our fugitive friends," Chris murmured. "Showing which way they went, I mean. Incidentally, why did that creature have to cradle you in its flippers for you to speak to him?"

"Matter of hearing. They've no ears—only hear by vibration at close quarters. A whistle on a certain note is the only thing they hear over a distance."

"Beats me how you turned out into an attractive girl, what with slugs as your educators and all," Chris sniffed.

"Even a slug can have kindness and unselfish devotion," she said seriously. Then as they came to another clearing,

"We can get to Ray's Clearing through what I call Vine Alley. If you're good at swinging you'll be okay. Follow me."

In another moment he saw what she meant. After a tour through dense underbrush they had ahead of them a long vista of ropy, dangling shapes stretching as far as Chris could see.

"Catch one and swing to the next," Vi said briefly. "If you miss you'll land in the swamp. So don't miss," she added significantly. "Or maybe you'd prefer a safer but longer route."

"Oh, yeah? Quit ribbing me, can't you? Let's go!"

She nodded and leapt upward and outward. Her steel muscles and fascinating grace were attributes which Chris could only marvel at every time he beheld them. With the ease of an aerial artist she swung from vine to vine, never once missing, to make unerring progress across the swamp waste bubbling turbidly below.

By exerting all his strength Chris finally managed to get across. He landed with aching arms, to find the girl languidly waiting, not even flushed from her efforts.

"Nice work," she commented dryly. "Now we take it easy. Ray's Clearing is just over the ridge."

Vi threw herself down flat and wriggled forward. Chris did likewise, and in a moment they poked their heads carefully amidst waving ferngrass and stared below on a verdure-encircled clearing. There in the middle of it was the fugitive space ship, its airlock open. Near it, squatting on upturned boxes in a circle around a radio receiver, were six men.

"Easy," the girl breathed, her eyes bright. "Only six of them. Have your gun ready."

She stood up, straight as a goddess for a moment, muscles rippling as she flexed her arms. Then she sprang!

The leap carried her outward into the clearing and she landed squarely on the back of the nearest man. Her yellow arm hooked under his bristly chin and yanked him backward. He gasped and choked under the sudden strangling grip.

Instantly the other men were on their feet, but their hands stopped halfway to their guns as the girl's free hand leveled her own weapon, while with the other she held the struggling, kicking thug over her head.

"Take it easy!" she snapped. "Drop your guns, the lot of you! One false move and I'll crack this guy's neck! Chris, take their arms."

He nodded and started to move forward, but at the same moment the man imprisoned in the girl's arm squirmed suddenly loose, hit on the balls of his feet, whirled around and slammed out his fist. The girl dodged like lightning, and the full force of her piledriver fist jolted the man right off his pins. Right on top of it her knuckles crashed into his jaw, dropped him like a sack of flour into the dust.

But the diversion had been enough. Even as Vi swung back a gun prodded into her spine.

"Okay, Amazon, drop your gun! Drop it! Get your arms up!"

Quietly she obeyed, face flaming with fury. She turned to find Chris similarly covered. He cast her a quick, hopeless glance.

"I'm Morgan." The man with the gun introduced himself, grinning. "And I'm boss of this little outfit, see? Guess you think you're smart, eh, Amazon? Just because you found a dead body in space, you fell for the gag, just as we figured. We even took good care to leave a trail that would lead you to us here. You're not the only one who knows Venus, baby!"

The girl stared. "You—you mean it was a *decoy*?"

"Nothing else but." The man's brutish face was still grinning. "Dr. Murray is still in New York—practicing medicine! And you're on Venus because you had to fall for a gag. Just too bad, isn't it? Sixty million miles too far out! Tsk, tsk!"

"That was Murray you threw out of your ship!" Chris shouted. "We'd know him anywhere."

"Yeah?" Morgan's eyebrows rose, then he shrugged. "That's what *you* think." He motioned sharply. "All right, boys, tie 'em up—and use chains for the Amazon. Rope won't hold *her*."

Vi stood impassive, her face set, as her wrists were manacled behind her with a length of steel chain. Chris made sundry efforts to break free, without success. The pair of them ended up on their backs near the space ship. Manacles and chains to their ankles held them tightly trussed up.

“Just what do you figure you’re going to get out of this, Morgan?” the girl asked bitterly, gazing up at him.

“I dunno. I’m just obeying orders. The Chief will tell us by radio what to do—that’s what it’s switched on for.”

He turned away and resumed his seat on the upturned crate near the receiver. At the moment it was chattering various items of news from the cosmos, reports from distant police headquarters in the void.

Chris began to strain gently at his ropes.

“If I could only get free of these cords, I’d beat the living daylight out of these rats!” he breathed.

“With no weapons on us and all the advantage with the enemy?”

The girl struggled to a sitting position and shook her black head.

“I know when I’m licked, even if you don’t. Besides, I want to think. It was Murray we found in the void: I could swear to it. Yet Morgan here says he’s still on Earth. Does he mean by that, I wonder, that *Murray* is the master mind we’ve been looking for all this time?”

“The whole thing was obviously an idea to get you and me out of the way,” Chris growled. He was silent for a moment. “The hell with it! Right now, I want to figure a way out of this mess.”

“It may not be so difficult at that,” the girl said quietly.

She threw back her head and gave a piercing whistle. It went echoing through the forest.

“Hollanders!” Chris breathed. “Of course!”

“Hey, there, cut it out!” Morgan jumped to his feet and came running up. “Hear me?”

The girl nodded slowly—and then whistled all the harder, until she was suddenly cut short by the stinging slap of Morgan’s palm across her face. Her lips twitched, her eyes blazed with anger.

“All right, Morgan, you asked for it,” she said very quietly.

He swung aside contemptuously, shouting to his uneasy men.

“Get set, boys! The Amazon’s given some sort of signal and we don’t know what’s coming. Blast the first thing that appears in this clearing!”

CHAPTER III

The Mighty Fallen

There was something rather comical in the way the men gathered in a group and stood glancing about with guns ready. Vi glanced at Chris and smiled twistedly. Things were about to happen.

Suddenly there was a cracking and snapping of branches from the undergrowth, and two Hotlanders appeared with claws bared in readiness. Immediately the girl shouted directions in the queer, chattering language of Venus; then she paused and lay watching anxiously.

“No chance of them hearing me, I’m afraid,” Vi said worriedly. “Only hope is they’ll realize I’m in danger and do something about it.”

“That,” Chris breathed, watching intently, “is just what they *are* doing!”

No sooner had he spoken than ray guns started blazing. Smoking holes were blasted in the earth, the Hotlanders themselves were hit and dropped with sickening impact. But still they came on, from different directions now, bellowing and roaring their fury.

One of the men twisted around, dashed for the space ship and started up the rocket exhausts with the obvious idea of a dash for safety into the upper air. But he was too hasty, failed to allow for the gravitational backdrag. All he accomplished was a blinding shower of sparks that half lifted the machine and then nose-dived it into the trees. But the sparks left their disaster behind them. The tinder-dry foliage began to smoke ominously, burst abruptly into flame.

Morgan came blundering through the fire, bawling at the top of his voice.

“Hey, you idiot! You’ve set the clearing afire! Get the hell out of that ship!”

He dived forward, dodged the downsweep of terrible claws and aimed his gun viciously. The Hotlander crumpled with its entire middle blasted away.

Hotlanders, scurrying men, dust and smoke were all a chaos now. In the midst of the confusion, above the crackle of fast-gathering flame, the radio set the gangsters had been clustered about burst rather incongruously into strident life.

“Calling Venusian Unit Five. Morgan! Calling Morgan! Here are your orders. If you have captured Violet Ray and Chris Wilson, return with them at once to Earth. If not, *find* them! Remember, the Amazon must be alive for you to claim your full bonus. You—”

The message wheezed off as a Hotlander trod on the receiver and smashed it to atoms.

“Private waveband, obviously,” the girl snapped, wriggling away from the approaching fire. “Pretty clear now it was all a trick to get us cornered. Not that we’re clear yet, with these fools’ chains around us.”

“Hey, you guys, did you hear that?” Morgan roared, appearing momentarily through the cloud of smoke and searching for his motley crew. “We’ve got to—” He vanished again as a Hotlander dived for him.

Here and there other men emerged through the smoke. It was evident from their isolated shouts that they had all heard the message, but events were too hectic for them to take any concerted action. The plunging Hotlanders and sweeping flames were ruthless enemies. And besides, their ship was becoming ringed in a blazing circle.

“We’ve got to get out of here!” Morgan’s voice bellowed. “Get out—into the jungle. Find a mud stretch. Get moving!”

“But the Amazon! There’s a bonus for her!”

“What do you want, a bonus or a coffin? Beat it! We’ll get the ship from the ashes later.”

The voices ceased, and the thunder of the Venusian beasts merged with the crackling of branches and undergrowth.

“They’ve gone,” Chris panted, coughing. “And your precious Hotlanders after them. They’ve left us to fry!” he finished hoarsely, staring at the girl’s grim face, then at the roaring flames. “We’ve got to get out of this!”

He set about tearing frantically at his bonds.

“Get back to back,” he panted. “See if you can shift these ropes.”

“Can’t. My hands are too tightly chained.”

Chris gave a groan of despair as a tongue of flame licked toward them and a nearby tree went up like a giant torch. Heat rose to dizzying proportions, sent sweat rolling down Chris’s face and arms. His wrists became slippery as he pulled and tugged. In a sense the fact helped him. Little by little, shifting his flesh along the rope, he began to draw his right hand clear. It came suddenly free, and his left hand was a simple matter.

Working with desperate speed he rolled to the nearest heavy stone and set about breaking the chain, thumped and banged until the links snapped. Instantly he jumped up, raced for the girl, and swept her still-chained form into his arms.

“Hang on—I’ll get you out of this!”

Vi lay passive, and it struck him for a moment that she seemed to be smiling, though what at he could not imagine. At top speed Chris bore her across the clearing, pulled up short before a roaring wall of flame. He backed out and tried another point—with the same result. Hopelessly he set the girl on her feet, supported her to prevent her from overbalancing.

“Vi, we can’t get out!” he shouted desperately, staring at the crackling ring. “We’re stuck—hemmed in!”

The girl’s eyes traveled round the encirclement. Finally she gave a sigh.

“Well, this is it,” Vi said shortly, and with that Chris saw her slender bare arms suddenly become taut. She set her teeth, strained until the veins began to show on her slender neck, until her shoulders were bunched with supreme effort.

Then suddenly there was a *click!* and Vi brought her hands around, her bleeding wrists clamped with manacles and dangling ends of broken chain. As Chris stood gaping, she sat down with a bump and caught her superhuman fingers in the links of the ankle chain. She twisted, turned, twisted again with relentless power. The strained link snapped abruptly and she got to her feet.

“Let’s go!” The girl caught Chris’s arm. “I’ll smash off these wrists and ankle cuffs later.”

“Why the devil didn’t you escape before?” Chris demanded, racing beside her.

“Dunno. Must have been the fear of death that gave me enough strength.”

Chris knew that was not the truth. He scowled thoughtfully as he ran. Then he pulled up short at another point in the flaming barrier. The girl studied it, shielding her face from the barrage of heat.

“Can you sink your manly dignity far enough to rely on me to get you out of here?” she asked briefly.

“Sooner do that than fry, naturally.”

“That’s being sensible. Now, put your arms around my neck—not to kiss me, you dope!” she added, as he faced her. “Hang yourself down my back—Good!”

Chris obeyed, clinging to the girl's supple form desperately as she leapt upward with terrific agility. He felt blinding heat waves about him as Vi levered herself into the branches of the nearest unburned tree. Seizing a vine, she went swinging out across a dizzy abyss of smoke and flame, landed in more branches with a crash—then she dropped so suddenly that Chris thought they had fallen.

But they hadn't. They plunged into a mud stretch and Chris fell free.

"Thought I was right," the girl said. "This mud stretch runs due north of Ray's Clearing. A mile wide, so fire can't reach us. We've only to head straight along it to overtake Morgan and his precious crew."

"But suppose we sink?"

"I've done this trip dozens of times. We'll sink no lower than our shoulders—less for you because you're taller than me. Come on—the Hotlanders' trail is everywhere around us," she added. "Morgan and company went this way for sure. They'll probably try to work around in a circle to regain their ship."

Chris moved through the sludgelike mass to the girl's side.

"How'd you know they went this way? Wish you'd recall that I'm a city man, not a wild product of the jungle," he finished slyly.

"That, Chris, sounds like a dirty crack." Vi nodded her head to the distant bank. "See those nearer trees, with their herringbone branches? They're carnivorous. I call them Indicator trees. Anything on a large scale of life—like a human being, or better still, a Hotlander—attracts them.

"They swing to it as a compass needle swings north, as an Earth tree bends to the prevailing wind. Those trees remain thus for twenty minutes after life has passed near to them. Then they straighten slowly. Natural plant reflex actions."

"Nice place," Chris sighed. "I can think of much better ways for my wife to live."

"Bridge, barrooms and boredom!" Vi snapped. "No dice!"

She went on again vigorously, the flowing mud up to her armpits. For half a mile or so the pair of them followed the mud river down-stream, leaving the smoky burning area somewhere behind them. Then the girl paused suddenly and surveyed the Indicator trees.

"Here!" she ordered cryptically, and finally climbed out onto a bank filmed in yellow mud. "Somewhere near here," she went on as Chris came floundering to her side. "See! A rough trail has been made. We can overtake them quicker through the trees."

She started shinning up the bole of the nearest giant, leaned down and dragged Chris up after her. Thereafter his slower progress held them up somewhat, but Chris stubbornly refused the aid of the girl's whipcord arm. As they went on she said,

"*Ultra's* not far from here, either—about a mile to the north. If we go carefully, we might be able to rope all our friends in and get them to the ship—turn them over to the earth authorities—"

"Without our guns?" Chris demanded.

"They've got guns—we can grab them. Of course, catching them won't stop the entire crime ring, but it'll be a help— And hurry up!"

Another half mile through the trees and the girl gave a quick signal. Chris' eyes gleamed as he stared through the foliage. Moving slowly in and out of the jungle, obviously lost, were

Morgan and three others. What had happened to the rest of the party could probably have been told best by the Hotlanders.

“Either capture or kill them,” Vi stated briefly. “Understand?”

“Yeah. But *I* want to sock Morgan. He hit you in the face—”

“So *I’ll* pay him back myself! You get the others—and watch out for their guns. Our best weapon is surprise. Let’s go!”

They leapt together, the girl traveling with projectile swiftness to crash clean on the back of the astounded Morgan. He tugged out his gun, but the girl’s fist knocked him off his feet before he had the opportunity. He scrambled up, then went flying backward with a bloody nose from the girl’s sizzling punch.

“Some fun, huh?” she snapped. “Now we’re really going to play!”

Chris, further along the trail, brought his right fist around with potent effect, sent one of the men spinning into the waiting folds of an Indicator tree—albeit unintentionally. Chris stared, then turned away sickened as ropy constrictor branches cracked bone and sinew in a merciless crunch.

Abruptly a fist struck him on the jaw. Chris staggered, lashed back, delivered an uppercut that surprised him and knocked his antagonist sprawling. Snarling the man pulled out his gun. Instantly Chris dived and, deflecting the lethal beam at the last moment, fell on top of the man—only to find the weapon had seared half his head away.

He got up, nauseated, snatched for the gun—and missed it, as the third of the gang plunged into the attack. As Chris fought he caught glimpses of the girl out of the corner of his eye. He saw Vi dive in a tackle, lift Morgan off his feet and whirl him over her head. With all her strength she prepared to hurl the man into a monstrous stretch of death-stinging nettles. But at the last moment the broken manacle on her right ankle caught in a piece of undergrowth. She toppled, overbalanced with Morgan on top of her.

“Vi!” Chris screamed in alarm.

Then the fist of Chris’ own assailant sent him spinning, his mouth salty with blood. Through a haze he saw the girl leap to her feet and lash out with her fist, but before it impacted Morgan’s hard knuckles struck her with terrific force on the jaw and knocked her flying. She started to rise again, and Morgan’s gun flamed. The girl relaxed weakly, blood suddenly welling from the thin burned slash across her bare left shoulder.

Something inside Chris snapped at that. For the first time in his life he saw the Amazon powerless, lying gasping on the ground at Morgan’s mercy. No longer a super-being but a suffering woman—

Chris swung round like lightning, charged at his remaining opponent and delivered a blow to the jaw that numbed his hand. Drunk with the onslaught, the man reeled helplessly, but he did not fall. For Chris caught him around the waist, drove him forward, delivered another blow, and another, that finally swung the man blindly into the bed of death nettles. Morgan fired twice, erratically. It was not possible for him to blast Chris without striking his own man.

Not that it mattered now. The man gave one frightful scream as the nettles closed over him, then his body sank out of sight in the fatal bush—

“One more move, Chris Wilson, and I’ll drop you!” Morgan screamed shrilly. “Come here!”

Panting, drenched with perspiration, Chris slowly obeyed. He ignored Morgan and bent down beside the girl. She raised a pained face.

“Looks—looks like I messed things up,” she breathed, relaxing again.

“Get up, Wilson!” Morgan roared. “Damn you, get to your feet!”

“Right!” Chris snapped, and literally shot up, fist included. The gun blazed, missed as Morgan’s jaw cracked under the impact of Chris’s hard knuckles. Morgan sat down, half stunned, bewildered, and found himself looking into the level barrel of his own gun.

“Now *you* get up!” Chris shouted. “On *your* feet!”

His brutish face scowling, Morgan obeyed. Still keeping him covered, Chris bent beside the girl, tore off what remained of his shirt and bound it hastily with one hand over the freely bleeding wound.

“If I’d given her the full width of my gun nozzle, I’d have blown her head off,” Morgan bleated. “I didn’t want to really injure her—” He was afraid to move at the light in Chris’s eyes.

“Can that stuff!” Chris snapped. “You’re only thinking of the bonus you can get—maybe! But you’ll take my orders from now on. The space ship’s around here some place. Start marching!”

“Northward,” the girl whispered weakly.

“Hang onto me, Vi,” Chris murmured, scooping her up into his arms. “I’ll see you’re all right. I’m not so weak as you think— Go on, you!” he roared, still keeping his gun trained on Morgan.

Morgan started walking, following the path the girl directed from time to time. Lying limply in Chris’ arms, she glanced up now and again into her young husband’s grim, perspiring face.

“Guess I’m only a woman after all,” she murmured a little bitterly.

“You’re just made of flesh and blood like everyone else,” Chris soothed her. “Don’t worry, I’ve got everything under control. I’ll soon patch up your shoulder when we reach the *Ultra*.”

Vi smiled faintly and seemed to become heavier in his arms. He glanced down at the red-soaked bandage and hurried his pace. Ever and again he roused the girl out of apparent stupor for fresh directions, until at last he stumbled into the open space he longed to see. The *Ultra* was still there on the mudflats.

“Go on!” Chris ordered, jabbing Morgan’s back with the gun.

“But it’s mud—”

“Jump from pale patch to pale patch. I know this planet backward! I’m only keeping you alive until I see what happens to Vi. If she gets any worse, I’m going to take you to pieces, bit by bit—and it’ll hurt! Otherwise you get Earth trial. Now move!”

In five minutes they were at the airlock. Chris lowered the half-fainting girl to the wall bed, then backed to the airlock and screwed it up. Still keeping Morgan covered, he started up the rocket engines, drove the ship swiftly into the upper atmosphere. Then he put his ray gun in the arms closet and locked it securely.

“Okay, Morgan. I’ll take care of you later.”

Morgan said nothing. He turned to the port and gazed outside. Then he turned back, to watch Chris busy with a bowl of water and first-aid kit. Chris stared at the girl’s weary face anxiously when he had at last stopped the flow of blood and treated the wound with tissue-knitting ointment. Her eyes brightened a little after a restorative.

“Better?” he asked earnestly, clasping her hand.

“Much,” she said quietly. Then her gaze looked beyond him.

“But you’ve still a lot to learn, Chris. Never turn your back on an enemy!”

“Huh?” Chris whirled around—and found himself staring into a leveled old-type revolver in Morgan’s hand.

“Not so smart, eh, Wilson?” the gangster grinned. “I carry a ray gun *and* a service revolver—just in case.”

Chris darted a glance at the girl. “Vi, you *must* have seen him pull this rod out! Why didn’t you warn me!”

“Because she’s got more sense than you have!” Morgan snapped. “If you’d have turned suddenly, I’d have drilled you. . . . Guess I’ve got the pair of you cornered,” he went on, surveying the helpless girl.

“As for you, Chris Wilson—” Morgan suddenly choked with rage. “Damn you, get to that control board!”

“If you touch Vi—” Chris blazed.

“*Get to that board!*”

Flushing angrily, Chris reluctantly did so.

“Now set the course to Earth,” Morgan snapped. “Maybe it was your intention, anyway—only you’ll drive where *I* say when we hit Earth. I’ve plenty to collect for the Amazon and you!”

Chris busied himself with the switches, then he said:

“You know, then, who the master mind is behind all this crime and intrigue?”

“Sure I do.” Morgan grinned sourly. “But I’m not telling you anything. You’ll find out for yourselves in time, but it won’t do you any good.”

Morgan leered cynically at them and then switched on the space radio.

“May as well see how the Chief is progressing.”

Fifteen minutes passed before a news bulletin was broadcast. The tape-recorded synthetic voice spoke with its usual dispassionate calm.

“The arson outbreak continues, on a larger scale than ever. Coming on the heels of five factory blazes which no fire brigade can extinguish, are reports of conflagrations in several Government-controlled works. Much of the mystery seems to be connected with Dr. Murray, formerly thought to be kidnaped but now known to be still in New York, though without his famous fire-creating formula. As yet the police have no effective leads.

“Some sources report amazing ultimata to the Government which savor of twentieth century gangsterism. It is thought that the demands include the turning over of vital national rights to other hands. If these demands are not complied with, a vast scale of fires is probable. Clearly, the same criminal ring that tried to master America by means of bacteria is—”

Morgan switched off suddenly.

“The Chief is going places,” he murmured.

“But Dr. Murray died!” Chris shouted. “We saw him! Now they say he’s on Earth—”

Morgan smiled contemptuously and sat down with his gun across his knees.

CHAPTER IV

The Master Mind

Chris got up suddenly from the control board and sat down beside the silent girl.

“Vi, do you realize what all this means?” he demanded. “We are the only ones who can do anything to halt this scheme—and we’re caught!”

“Beef all you like,” Morgan chuckled harshly. He got up, thrust his gun in his belt. “But just don’t start anything. I’m going to fix myself a meal.”

Chris watched him moving clumsily about in the storage cupboard, then he turned back to the girl and spoke in low tones.

“Vi, now you’re laid up, what’s the next move? Tell me! I’ll carry on the fight until—”

The girl eased herself up a little, winced and fell back.

“You’re right—I *am* laid out,” she breathed. “And—and there’s something else, too—wrong with me, I mean. There’s a weakness about me that I don’t like.”

Chris gestured reassuringly. “Nothing—loss of blood, that’s all. Capsules concentrated at triple strength will put you right.”

“If I were a normal woman, yes. But—”

“Hey, there, you two, quit talking!” Morgan ordered.

He pulled up the portable table and laid his gun beside his plate.

“Eat!” he snapped. He jerked the girl up unceremoniously to a sitting position. Vi sat white-faced, holding her bandaged shoulder and taking the capsules Chris doled out to her.

“And get this,” Morgan added, when the silent meal was finished, “I’m taking restorative pills to keep me awake throughout this entire trip. So don’t try anything funny.”

With that the gangster took up a watchful position, with his chair on its hind legs against the wall. Gun on his knees, he sat watching, grim and uncommunicative. Chris returned slowly to the control board, bitter, frowning. He was not afraid of risking the gun; but he was afraid of jeopardizing Vi’s life. Therein lay the reason for his inaction.

Morgan kept his word. As the flying chronometer days and nights sped by; as the ship tore through infinity to ever-swelling Earth; as the radio chattered at intervals of fire disasters, the gangster maintained his unremitting surveillance in the *Ultra*.

Vi was about again, but curiously quiet. For a reason Chris could not fathom, she had lost her usual cynical daring and crisp activity. She seemed morose, languid, despite the fact that soothing unguents had long since healed her shoulder.

It was when the ship came within visible distance of the General Barrier at Heavyside that Chris could stand it no longer. He turned from gazing through the port, and with the eyes of Morgan upon him went over to the girl’s side.

“Vi, what is it?” He caught her slender hands. “You’re well again, aren’t you?”

“Not altogether.” She paused, searched his face keenly with her violet eyes. “You know what gives me my strength, don’t you?”

“Why, sure. Venus produced a steady anabolism in your physique—building up your cells, whereas normally they would break down. So?”

Vi said quietly, “A skin surface wound causes a tremendous breakdown in the cellular strength I’ve built up all my life. It happened once before when I was injured. Maybe months will pass before I get even a semblance of my old strength back again.”

Chris stared at her, baffled. “But, Vi, I don’t get it. How could this happen?”

“Sampson shorn of his hair,” she sighed. “I have about the strength of a normal woman, and until I can soak myself in Venus’ unique climate again, it’ll be a long time before I’m fully myself once more.

“However”—she flashed a glance at the distantly watching Morgan—“I’ll take one more chance. Maybe I’m strong enough to swing it. If I can distract Morgan’s attention and get some real sting into my punch, you can get his gun.”

“Right! Wondered when you were going to suggest something. I’ll watch your every move.”

Vi got to her feet presently and strolled casually to the port, to look out on the fast-approaching Heaviside General Barrier with the swirling police machines. Then suddenly she swung round, charged straight for the waiting Morgan with her fist clenched. Up came his arm straight away, and his gun followed it. But he had no need to use it.

His blow sent the girl tottering backward helplessly. She fell on the switchboard, clutched the levers to save herself. Slowly she stood up, quivering.

“I was right, unfortunately,” she whispered, as Chris stared in dismay. “I’ve lost my strength. I’m like any other woman—anywhere.”

“Huh?” Morgan ejaculated, mouth gaping.

“It’s your fault!” she blazed. “But for your wounding me, this would never have happened! I’m no longer the Amazon! Don’t you understand?”

“Yeah— Sure I do!” Morgan grinned complacently. He reached forward, gave the girl a shove and watched her spin helplessly onto the wall bed.

“Feeble as a kitten,” he chuckled. “Well, that’s swell—but since I recall your brain always hits on every cylinder, I’ll keep you covered just the same.”

Morgan swung around. “Wilson, take this ship north of the city. I’ll direct you.”

Chris moved with a hopeless gesture to obey. Morgan turned again and whirled the girl to her feet.

“Put on overalls over that costume!” he snapped. “You’ll do the same afterward, Wilson. Don’t want either of you recognized when we land.”

Chris moved the rocket controls, sent the ship whirling over the twilight mass of the city. Presently the lights came up below and he plunged downward, still following directions. At last he landed on an open stretch of ground at the spaceport.

“Okay, Wilson. Now those overalls.”

Morgan waited impatiently, finally surveyed the pair, then jerked open the airlock.

“Outside!” He put his gun in his pocket and retained his grip on it. “And take care what you say and do. If there has to be any talking, leave it to me.”

They went across the busy spaceport without molestation, took a check from the robot inspector. Morgan stopped and hailed the first express taxi, gave brief directions. Ten minutes of whirling through streets and across intersections brought them to a ponderous, isolated residence of the pre-Change era on the outskirts of the city.

“Move!” Morgan ordered, and followed the two up a long, dark driveway lined with trees.

“Say, isn’t this Dr. Murray’s home?” Chris asked the girl in a low voice.

“Yes. But—”

“Shut up, you two! I said I’d do all the talking!”

As they approached the massive front door, they caught a glimpse of a heavy closed truck pushed into the concealment of shrubbery. Then the door opened at Morgan’s insistent ringing.

They walked through a cavern of a hall, up a flight of stairs, and came then into a glare of lights in one of the front rooms. The place was fitted up as a library, the curtains drawn tightly across the windows. One or two men were present, and one in particular stood by the fireplace. There was no mistaking that ponderous form—it was Dr. Grant Murray!

“Murray!” Chris exclaimed, blinking in the light. “Vi, it *is* Dr. Murray! That body in space —”

Murray broke in coldly. “You’ve done well, Morgan. If ever a man earned a reward, you have. Chris Wilson *and* the Amazon!”

“Thanks, Chief.”

“Then you’re the Chief!” Chris breathed. “But how— You can’t be! You’re Dr. Murray!”

“No, he isn’t, Chris,” the girl said quietly. “I suspected the truth when it was too late to do anything about it. It *was* the real Dr. Murray that was thrown from the space ship, wasn’t it?”

“How’d you guess it?” Murray smiled cynically. “Your brain is still very keen, I see. I am not Murray, of course, but I *am* the man who was at the banquet. I simply left the room, and a decoy led you and Wilson here to Venus, took you right out of my way.

“Then I turned up again as Murray in a dazed condition and threw the police off the scent while I got busy. They’ve questioned me, believe my secret was stolen, even suspect that you might have something to do with it after fleeing to Venus. . . .

“My make-up? Synthesis. Oh, yes, while nobody has bothered me here, I have been very busy. A double move, remarkably astute. Naturally, fires are controlled from my mobile truck outside, and radio messages are sent from there, too, to defeat government detectors. Need I add the real Murray fell into my hands long enough ago and now lies in the void. . . . Too bad!” he added hypocritically but soft-voiced.

“And now,” the Chief added, as the two remained silent, “I shall have to be melodramatic, I’m afraid. Since I have had you captured—which was my firm intention—I shall now destroy you. From a distance,” he finished, smiling. “Murray’s fire creator is remarkably efficient. Fasten them both up, boys!”

“Nothing to fear from the Amazon, Chief,” Morgan grinned. “She got wounded and finished up behind the eight-ball. She’s gentle as a lamb now.”

Murray leaned toward her in the chair as she was firmly lashed to it.

“So the lioness has had her fangs drawn, eh? Such a pity! Not that it matters, since you and Wilson will shortly cease to exist anyway. No trace, no evidence—even Murray himself presumably destroyed.” He straightened up suddenly. “Let’s go, boys.”

The girl, wincing at the tightness of the cords, said slowly,

“Some day, maybe, I’ll find out who you really are! Last time I failed to even see you; this time I see you as somebody else. But *some* day—”

“I’m afraid,” the Chief sighed, “you are blessed with vast optimism.” He swung to the door, paused a moment. “The fires are short, swift, and incredibly devastating. Perhaps you will not suffer too much—”

The door slammed and locked as the last man trooped out.

Immediately Chris started working on his bonds desperately.

“Got to get free somehow,” he panted, straining with all his power. “It’s all up to me now. That dirty swine! All set and waiting for us. Give my right eye to know who he really is. Something familiar about him—”

Chris broke off in sudden surprise. On the night air had come the distant wailing of a police siren which grew increasingly louder.

“Police!” he gasped, starting at the bound girl. “How the heck did they know?”

“Simple enough,” Vi replied quietly. “Remember when I fell on the switches after Morgan hit me? I pulled out the signal lever without his noticing it—no other way to do it. We went right through General Barrier with the red triple-cross blazing. Naturally that means ‘Danger: please follow.’”

“As I expected, the Barrier police recognized the *Ultra*—and they followed us after getting reinforcements. Only thing is, we’ve got to stop Murray, Morgan and the rest of ’em from getting away in that truck before the police come.”

“But these ropes are as tight as hell!”

“Maybe—” The girl suddenly heeled her chair over backward, rolled over onto her side, then began to straighten her body with every ounce of her power. The knots began to slide and slip! The strands across her breast parted one by one. Her arms moved slowly outward, until with a sudden snapping and cracking she was free, her feet kicking loose the remaining cord.

Immediately she was at Chris’s side, working with nails and flawless white teeth, twisting the ropes in and out of her fingers, until his bonds were ripped free. He stood up thankfully, caught the girl in his arms.

“Vi, you’ve recovered! You’re strong again!”

“I was never anything else,” she answered briefly. “Sorry, Chris, but I couldn’t help it. There was no other way of getting Morgan to bring us right to his Chief’s headquarters. He might not have taken the full chance if he’d thought I was as strong as usual.”

Now the sirens were whining at full blast outside. They died away as the cars screeched to a stop. Vi raced to the door and tore at it. All she did was tear the knob right off its socket. She swung to the window, ripped aside the curtains and flung the sashes wide.

Chris beside her, she stared outside. Below there was a whirl of men in the shrubbery lit by the cars’ floodlights.

“Morgan! There!” Chris said abruptly, pointing. “You take him. I’ll try to find Murray.”

Vi nodded, leapt to the ledge, then dropped the thirty feet straight as a plummet. Morgan, beleaguered by zipping bullets and ray-gun beams, was crouching behind the mobile truck when the girl landed. He whirled in alarm.

“Amazon! I—I thought you—”

“That I was a weak kid, eh?” She smiled knowingly. “Too bad for you. I’m still strong—and I remember that wound you gave me.”

Vi sprang like a tiger as Morgan whirled his gun around. The weapon went flying away. Then the girl had Morgan’s wrist and ankle in an iron grip and was whirling him over her head. He crashed into the truck and fell weakly, only to be dragged up again.

A fist like concrete smashed into the gangster’s jaw, made it blaze with pain. Again he was picked up and flung at the truck. He collapsed with his head whirling in darkness.

The girl twisted around then, gazed at the fighting men. Then Chris’s voice reached her from the uproar.

“Murray! There he goes!”

Vi whirled around and was just in time to see the man tearing away into the shrubbery. Immediately she plunged after him, vaulting bushes as she went. The girl overtook him with ease, dragged him down as he was about to climb the surrounding railings.

One punch in the stomach doubled the Chief up. A left hook jerked his head back like a punching bag. He dropped prone to the loamy soil, with the girl standing over him. Satisfied, she dropped beside him and pulled at the cohesive synthetic flesh on his face. It came off with a yanking rip that brought him half back to consciousness.

Vi stared in amazement at the features thus revealed. Around her Chris and a batch of police gathered.

“It’s Welgand, chief of police!” Chris exploded.

The girl’s face set grimly. She yanked the dazed, disheveled Welgand to his feet. His thin, hard face, in contrast to the padding which made his body paunchy, was incongruous.

“What the hell—” began the police squad sergeant, staring.

“No wonder crime’s flourished so well and been so prosperous when Welgand was the master mind,” the girl said slowly. “Quite a lot is becoming clear now. The reason why the supposed Murray—otherwise Welgand—wasn’t questioned too closely, for instance. Also, the reason why the police were always anticipated in their raids. Nice going!”

Vi shook Welgand angrily. “Wake up!” she snapped. “Spill it!”

Welgand shrugged, fingering his jaw.

“All right, so what? Influence made me chief of police, and I used the influence to my own ends. At the banquet I had only to leave, get rid of my face makeup, remove clothing and padding, and then come in again in my official capacity. I purposely tried to stop you from going to Venus when we both saw the escaping figure on the rooftops, because I knew if I did that, your obstinacy would make you go. Human nature,” he added sourly.

“As to the rest, it all adds up. When I was controlling my own organization, I was simply away on business important to the police staff. Nobody questions the chief of police. Just the same, Amazon, you’re not going to win *this* round—”

He broke off and popped something in his mouth suddenly.

“Poison!” Chris shouted.

Welgand nodded, then with a low moan he dropped to the ground. Vi felt his heart.

“Still beating, anyway. Better get him to a hospital. How about the other men?”

“All roped in, and the invention’s in the truck, anyway. Morgan’s still out cold. Jaw smashed in two places.”

“Wow!” Chris breathed, as the girl rubbed her knuckles pensively. Then she moved with the party to the police car and watched it back up. Almost immediately there was a shout from the officers.

“Hey! Welgand’s gone!”

Chris whirled about in dismay, raced with the girl back to the spot. The floodlights were on it again now, but of Welgand there was no trace at all, only the flattened loam where he had dropped.

“But how could he—” demanded the squad sergeant helplessly.

“It wasn’t poison, obviously,” the girl snapped. “We were idiots to fall for that gag. Come on!”

But a careful search revealed nothing. What was significant, was that ten minutes later a rocket ship flared into the heavens half a mile away and rapidly climbed to the stars.

“So he had a space machine parked close by, in case of emergency,” the girl sighed. “There goes Welgand! We know his name, his face, and his occupation, but— Well, there he goes!”

“We’ll get him,” vowed the police sergeant. “We’ve got a lead on him now. . . . Well, want a lift to town?”

Vi shook her head. “No, thanks. Be there later to make a report.”

She stood with Chris watching the truck and cars make their way down the drive. She was smiling a little.

“It still rankles, Mrs. Wilson,” Chris murmured.

“Rankles? What rankles, Mr. Wilson?”

“The way you kidded me into thinking you were weak. Look at the risks and effort I went through!”

“Not entirely because you thought me weak,” Vi murmured, her eyes on the stars. “But because you thought yourself strong. That was the idea—partly.”

He caught her fondly in his arms. And even as he did so, the words she had just said echoed in his brain.

“That was the idea—partly,” Vi had said. *Partly*. Did the Golden Amazon have her vulnerable point too, Chris wondered. . . .

But now was not the time for such thoughts.

“So you just wanted to give me a chance to prove myself!” he chuckled, holding the girl close.

“Isn’t that what you wanted?”

Her lips pursed impudently, and her eyes were smiling.

“Not half so much,” Chris said fervently, “as I want you!”

[The end of *The Amazon Fights Again* by John Russell Fearn]