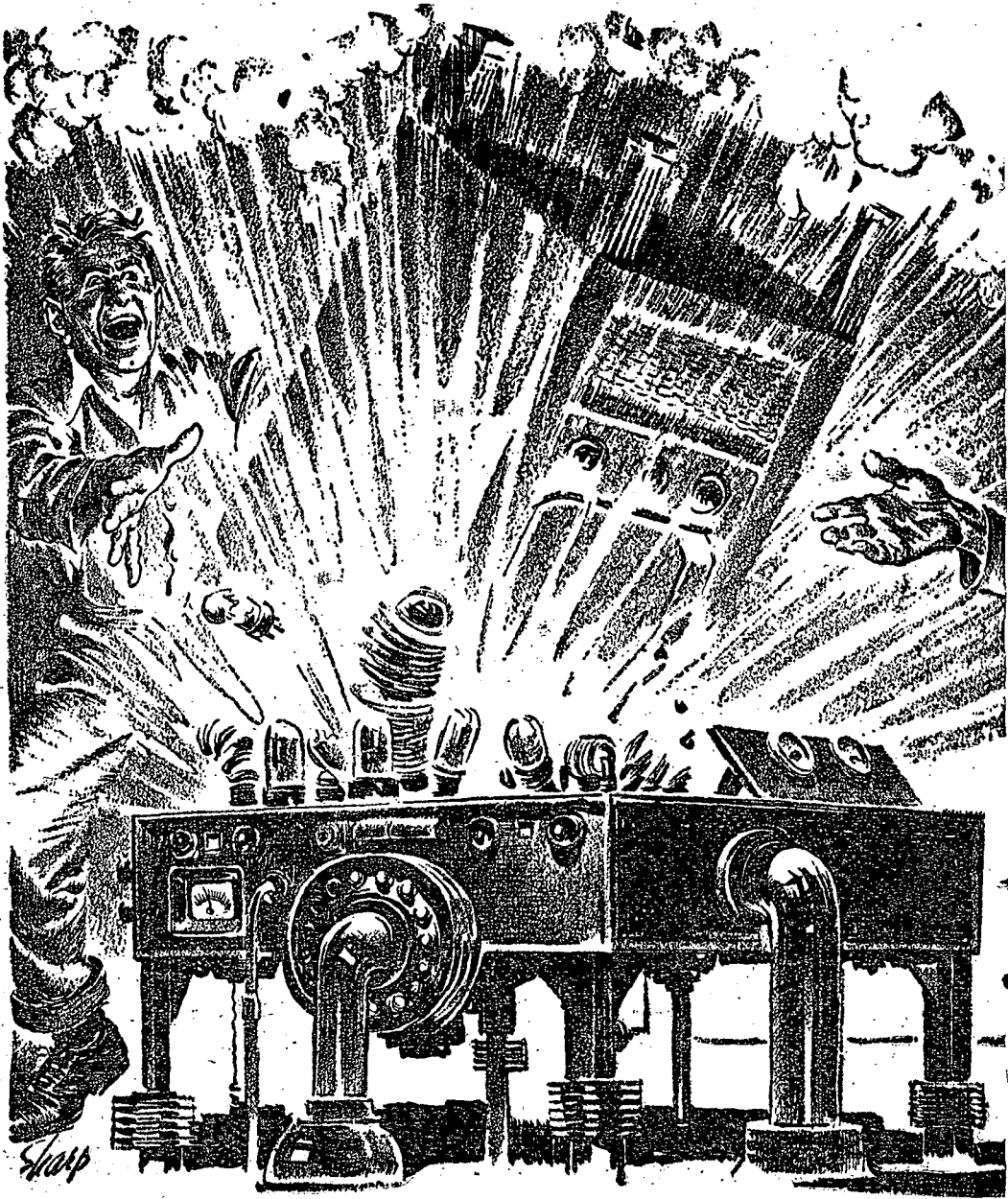


The RADIANT MENACE

By Geoff St. Reynard



**Earth had always resisted any invader;
but the Martians used a new type of weapon—
softly rounded curves instead of cold steel!**

NOW I ADMIT that when this menace to the human race first showed up, none of us recognized it for that; why, if you'd come in and said "Menace!" to us during those early days, we'd have laughed in your face. Or more likely booted you out the nearest exit for disturbing us in the midst of our gleeful appreciation and bug-eyed, open-mouthed, whole-hearted absorption. But it's the same story with all the

big dangerous things, I guess. The old men can remember long-ago times when splitting the atom was a topic for happy conjecture as to its unalloyed benefits, and for bad jokes about scientists with wee tiny hammers and chisels. Gunpowder in its infancy, they tell me, was brewed exclusively for use in Chinese firecrackers. Forty-odd years ago there was a strutting little posturer called Adolf who had such big ideas and looked



As he tripped over the cable there was a blinding flash from the machine...

so comical that half the world thought he was a clown, for the first couple of years. . . . So it goes, so it always goes.

I'm with Trivideo Inc. I install those big three-dimensional television sets, once in a while I do a simple servicing job, and maybe twice a year I'll put in one of the antiquated two-plane sets for some diehard gaffer who's trying to recapture the good old days. I don't know a lot about electronics; I don't even know a voluminous amount on electricity. I'm just a good mechanic, and have been tinkering with these apparatuses so long that I can tell by instinct what to jiggle or attach or switch when anything goes wrong. I'm pretty good at my job, if I do say so.

This morning I'm talking about, I went out to install one of our 44-N models. The 44-N is a beautiful piece of expensive intricacy. It has a plastimahogany case, stands five feet three on its rubberoid paws, and sports a screen that's three feet wide and as deep as any you'll find on the market today. It is a gorgeous job. We're proud of the 44-N at Trivideo Inc. And with all its massiveness, it weighs only about thirty-five pounds, on account of the light plastimahogany, which was developed by one of our own research boys at the New York plant.

Ed Hornigold went with me to help with the installation. Ordinarily I'd have gone alone, because one man can handle the 44-N by himself if he's careful. But we were putting this set in for a VIJ, a Very Important Joe. He was a scientist himself, this Joe, among other vocations too numerous to remember, and so Ed went along to talk intelligently to him about the internal workings of old 44-N. I can plug them in and twiddle their knobs and fix them so they'll work like a dream, but let a customer

who knows his waves and images start to ask penetrating questions, and I'm done. Hence Ed Hornigold.

Well, we parked in front of this VIJ's house, a fine tall stone place in the suburbs of South Einsteinville, and I went around to the back of the truck to hand the bulky set down to Ed, and between us we carried it over the stoop. I rang the door chimes. Deep in the house we could hear them play the first few bars of something which Ed informed me was the Vivaldi Concerto in A Minor. "This lad's a lover of good music, Bill," he said further.

"He sure is. What've you got on your chimes this week, Ed?"

"An American in Paris."

"I got the Lunar Blues, the whole doggone thing. My wife loves it. She keeps sending the kids out to push the button."

"You, I suppose you prefer Bach. Old Bill, reeking with culture."

"Hell, yes," I said, and then the door opened and we plucked up the set and took it inside.

"Doctor James Garvin?" I asked the big blond fellow with fire-blue eyes, and he nodded. "Where do you want this set, sir?"

"Up in my lab. Follow me, gentlemen." He clicked a switch and some steps dropped from the ceiling and we all went up to the second floor, emerging in the middle of a casual-looking welter of flasks, burners, convoluted tubes, precision instruments, generators, machines with spines and nodes and spark-gaps and all that sort of intricate expensiveness, and in short more gadgetry than I'd seen in a month of Wednesdays. I stared around and my eye met that of a whopping big robot that was standing in a corner with half his metal viscera scattered on a bench before him. I gulped. The eye looked reproachful, as though I'd done all that to him.

Hastily I gaped elsewhere.

GARVIN FLICKED another switch and the stairs folded up into the interspace between stories, making a flat floor where there had been a stairwell. Very neat thing. Saves a lot of space, I guess. Me, I like the old-fashioned steps that are built to stay in one place; they give you more confidence.

We'd set the big 44-N down. Now Doc Garvin, who was quite muscular and good-looking for a scientist, pointed to a wall and said, "Over there, please." So rough and rugged old Bill had to show off, and prove what a dexterous, powerful brute he was, to dispel some of the inferiority complex that had swamped him in the presence of the best known adventurer-savant in the States; and so fat-headed Bill—that's me, in case you're confused—picked up the whole weighty-looking 44-N trivideo set and murmured in an offhand manner, "Over there, eh, Doc?" Brash as hell and twice as stupid.

"Let me give you a hand, Bill," said Ed. He knew that I wrestle these light jobs around by myself all the time, but he had a premonition, I suppose.

Oh, no. Cave-boy Bill can cart it over with one hand. Look at me. I may not have seventy-two honorary letters after my name, nor be a top atomic physicist and the first man to see the other side of Luna, nor be as noble-looking as Errol Twofist the movie star, but by gosh I can tote thirty-five pounds of expensive plastimahogany and alumisteel innards with my thumb and two fingers. I brushed Ed aside and strutted across the lab.

"Look out for the—" said Garvin urgently.

Something-caught at my ankle. I felt for one eternal instant that I

was a quail rocketing over a marsh with a shotgun banging at my tail, and then I wound up flat on my puss amidst the remains of something or other which I had been thinking looked very fragile, and now—was proved to be just that. There was a dull, tinkly, horrifying thud off to my right. I lay there, watching six months' wages vanish with my mind's eye, and wondering if I'd be fired in addition to having to pay for the 44-N.

"—Wire," finishes Garvin, somewhat belatedly.

Ed Hornigold picked me up and under cover of pretending to brush me off gave me a hearty belt in the belly, quick and short so the Doc wouldn't see him. "You blubber-brained gnat-head," he growled, which was unkind, since anybody will occasionally trip over a wire. I'll bet James Garvin himself did it at times.

Well, we picked up the 44-N, which had fallen onto a mess of prickly metal balls and spikey objects, several of which were emitting green flashes and humming irritably. We moved it over to the clear space by the wall, and Doc Garvin turned off the humming flashes and tinkered a minute, then said kindly, "No harm done here, gentlemen. Let's look at my trivideo set."

By then I was thinking of it as *my* set, of course, since I almost certainly would have to purchase it to appease my employers; and I was wondering what my wife would do for new dresses during the next year while we were living on half-pay, and more especially what she would be saying to me about it from then on. I turned 44-N around so we could see the giant screen, and after plugging it into an outlet I snapped on the sound and picture controls before Ed could suggest that we inspect the innards. There was a bare possibility that

nothing had happened to the thing, and I wanted to find out quite soon, before I perspired all my breakfast orange juice away through my scared and gaping pores.

Ed was officiously trying to peer behind the set, to see if there were any tubes and wires hanging out in mortal agony I guess, and Doc Garvin was standing beside me with his hand on my shoulder. He was emanating good will and forgiveness, and I was grateful. The Doc was a sort of a nice Joe, you know, considering that he had done everything, been everywhere, and knew everything there was to be known, and with it all was only about thirty-five years old. You might have expected him to be puffed up as a frog with importance, but no.

"There seems to be—" began Ed from the rear of the set.

"Shut up. Something's coming."

The screen was all fluttery with unresolved patterns, and it looked like the old two-dimensional screens used to look when they were getting test patterns. It was a kind of silver-gray shade. I didn't like the looks of it.

I turned up the volume control, to drown out Ed's bleating, and got a very fine sound, if you enjoy hearing thirteen flutes out of tune playing in a barrel.

"Hmm," said our host.

"Hmm," I repeated brightly. I clicked it off and we turned the 44-N around and all three of us bent over and gaped inside:

"Looks okay to me," said Ed grudgingly.

Well, Ed has the education and the brains, and he can call every atom in a set by its full name, but me, I got the know-how. I'm on the more dismal side of forty, and have been working with these things and their granddads since I was kneehigh to a

bean sprout. I can feel it when there's something haywire with a set.

I PUT ON my gloves and fiddled with this and that, and pushed an electrode to see if it was as loose as it looked, and checked the receptors, and cased the rest of the stuff briskly, and it looked a little better; so I turned her around again and snapped her on.

First the volume blatted out like a siren. I turned it low. The screen grew the gray-silver sheen, then deepened to purplish and instead of two-dimensions we were looking into it deeply, like you should into any respectable trivideo set. The colors began to play around, very agile and lissome. "Beautiful!" said Doc Garvin heartily, and I had to agree with him, even though the weird compositions worried me. I had never seen a shaft of mauve hue dance intricately with half a dozen globules of plaid before. It was a very eye-widening experience. "A perfect symphony of color," our scientist went on. "What is it? A new development in jazz musicolor? Wonderful!"

"It looks like jazz, all right," I said.

"If it is," said Ed nastily, "where's the music?"

"You got me."

"Watch the screen," I told Garvin. "I'll tinker with things. Maybe we can fix the old girl up without taking her back to the plant."

"I hope so," nodded the Doc. "There's a program of astronomy tonight I don't want to miss. You know," he went on, as I crouched down behind the half-turned set and started to ponder over the alumisteel guts of 44-N, "our expedition will be starting in just eight days now. Not much time left to amuse myself!"

"You going to Luna again, or what?"

"Great heavens, man, haven't you heard of the Martian Project?" he spluttered.

I shrugged. "I been pretty busy."

"Why, the screens and circuits have been full of it for months! It's what I've been planning all my life: the first flight to Mars, man! I'm taking—"

I had to chuckle then. It had seemed to me that this VIJ was the sort you could pull a joke on, and he was. He stopped, coughed, turned pink, and laughed like hell. "I didn't think anybody in America could have escaped the publicity," he said. "Guess I was fairly cocky about it, eh? No kidding, though, it's just eight days off, and that's why I want this trivideo set now. I have to relax. I'm as tense as an E-string."

"Why do you want it here in your lab?" asked Ed.

"I've got some things to wind up. A few calculations, and then there's Herman there," he pointed to the partially dismantled robot, "who has to be assembled in time to go with me."

"So you're going to relax with the three-di screen, while putting together a robot and calculating a trip to Mars. Ah," said I, noodling with some dials in the back, "ah, Doc, what are you planning to do with your free hand?"

He started to laugh, and then he broke it off and yipped, "It's resolving! It's going to clear up, I think!"

I craned my neck around to see into the screen. The colors were smoothing out. I snaked around on my knees and hunkered in front of it, Ed looking over one shoulder and Doc Garvin over the other. The screen cleared and there was the tri-dimensional picture.

Well, I can't describe it for you with any great beauty of phrase. I'm not equipped to reproduce that amaz-

ing color, that perfection of form, in rolling sonorous words. But bear with me, and I'll try.

It was a little glade in a woodland. The trees in the background were all shades of green and red—yes, red, and I don't mean autumn leaves either. Their boles were scarlet, vermilion, pink, rust, salmon, claret... while the green trees faded from emerald to olive, from cobalt to citrine. Funny thing, you'd imagine those different tints would clash. Not a bit of it. There were superbly harmonious. Honest to John.

The ground looked soft and cool. It didn't have regular grass on it, so far as I could tell. It just looked smooth and restful, like a great big resilient mattress of light blue-green.

What we could see of the sky was regulation deep blue.

Down through the center of the pic meandered a stream of golden liquid, clear and laughing with sun-glints on its ripples. It was like no water you ever saw. It looked—well, it looked like the celebrated combination of milk and honey, heavy on the bee-juice.

There wasn't a sign of life from top to bottom and side to side. Just the glade, the stream, the queer beautiful colors.

We all waited expectantly for a minute. Nothing happened.

"That's odd," said Doc Garvin. "What can it be?"

"It's a pip of a set, whatever it's meant to be. Try the sound again, Bill. Maybe there's some narration going on," said Ed.

I GOT THE same awful noises when I turned up the volume knob. "No good," I said. Then I took the current list of programs out of my hip pocket and thumbed down till I hit ten A.M. There was a kiddies' program, a home cookery hour, chamber

music, a couple of detergent operas including my wife's favorite, Mary's Other Life, which is all about this reincarnated babe who—well, never mind; there was a lecture on supersonic flights, and a couple of other varied items. I read their titles aloud to the other two. Garvin rubbed his strong chin thoughtfully.

"This can't possibly be any of them. Is that absolutely all that's being telecast now?"

"Including the Scandinavian. That's the works."

We all looked at the screen again. "Holy Toledo," said Ed doubtfully. "What have we got, then?"

Garvin went back and took a look at the entrails of old 44-N. Then he squinted thoughtfully—we were all extremely thoughtful at that point—and he lit a pipe, and then he scowled at the machine or whatever it was on which I had tossed the trivideo set in my recent tumble. "By the gods," he said. "By Pan and Ormazd and Ganyমেদে. By all of 'em. I have an idea."

"That's more than I have," said I.

"All you have," said Ed, "is big flat feet and no sense."

"Listen, gentlemen," said Garvin, puffing out smoke like an old-fashioned chimney, "for decades we've been trying to perfect a receiving set that will reproduce waves of light which are not being broadcast, not being sent at all in the usual sense...."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean a set that will show what's happening at another point without that point having a sending apparatus. A video screen that will catch waves untouched by the mechanisms of man, d'you see? In other words, a receptor for ordinary light waves that are actually simon-pure light waves, not photographed—not bent—not even seen, maybe—by anybody. A vizi-phone without wires, a television with-

out a broadcasting station, a photographic print without a camera. Plainly, gentlemen, a machine to pick up what's going on anywhere on earth. *Anywhere*. Train it on the North Pole, see the North Pole. Ditto the South Sea islands. No sending set, no wires, nothing up the sleeves, just one set in one place to send its fingers of atomic sensitivity throughout the world to pick up what's transpiring anyplace you want to see."

"I get you," I said. "It's quite a dream."

"I think we're looking at that dream now," said Doc Garvin. "I think you've stumbled—literally!—on the fulfillment of that dream. Somehow you jumbled the internal workings of your 44-N into a new pattern, and now it's picking up a scene from God knows where, and showing us a forest glade that may be a hundred miles from the nearest trivideo station."

"Pretty far-fetched," grunted Ed dubiously.

"Well, which of the scheduled programs do *you* think this is?" I asked him. "By gosh, I think Doc—I mean Doctor Garvin—is right."

As one man we whipped around to the back of the set. "Don't touch anything again," warned the scientist. "We can't take chances yet. Wait a minute." He hared away and came back with a fistful of slim metallic tools like dentist's mirrors on stalks. "We can inspect all the mechanism with these."

Ed checked the tubes, the Doc brooded over this and that, while I shoved my skull way into the thing and with my semi-periscopic mirror checked up on keys, dials, circuits and speaker parts which I hadn't been able to see plainly before. And when I found the part we were all looking for, a very queer little chill began to trot up and down my spine, like a

drunken mouse with feet of ice....

In the section devoted to depth perception devices, there was a lean dull-surfaced tube of metal alloy. Ordinarily it should have run straight up from its base to a point just below an electrolytic cell. But when I dropped the set onto Doc Garvin's machinery, something had socked the tube and bent it into a slightly angular position. Just below and just above the bend, the dull alloy had developed a shine on its surface. And in the middle of the bend—

The tube wasn't there.

IT WASN'T broken in half. There weren't any jagged edges. The metal simply faded, yes, *faded* into nothingness. There was an infinitesimal distance where you could see it shimmering if you squinted hard, and then it was gone. A fraction of an inch later it shimmered into being again, then became a tube once more.

I husked once or twice and said, "I found it."

They looked at it with their own mirrors. "Holy Toledo," said Ed Hornigold. "Aha!" chimed in the Doc.

"What is it?"

"The culprit. Conversely, the splendid little accident."

"Tell me I need glasses," I said. "Tell me it's intact."

"No indeed. It really disappears. It goes, unless all my degrees mean nothing, unless my researches count for nought, it goes into another dimension. And there it manages to pick up the images we just saw on the screen. How, why, where—Lord knows!"

"You mean that all those trees and things are in another dimension?"

"Well, perhaps not. Probably not. But the center of that tube *is*, and somehow that makes possible the transmission, without sending apparatus, of the images."

Carefully turning old 44-N so that

her back was against the wall, in case, as Ed said, I should happen to fall on it again, we went and got chairs and sat down before the screen.

And we sat there the whole blessed day, till Ed jumped and looked at his watch and said, "Hey! It's four-thirty!"

"Bill," said the Doc (by that time we were calling each other Bill and Ed and Jim), "I'll call your boss. I'm going to get a vacation with pay for you two, and in the seven days I have left we're going to do some mighty careful toying with this set. You were in on the beginning of it, and you deserve to stick it through with me." He rang my chief on the viziphone, and five minutes later Ed and I had instructions to help Doctor Garvin in whatever he desired, and report back to the office when we were through, whether it was a week or a month.... Garvin could do things like that. He was really a VIJ.

"Go home and get a good night's rest," he told us, shaking our hands heartily. "Tomorrow we'll tinker."

I hated to leave. That may sound funny. There we'd been sitting in front of that picture for six hours and more, and it hadn't changed at all, except that what we could see of the sky had grown to a darker blue. No living creature had romped onto the scene. Not even a wind had stirred the multicolored leaves of the variegated trees. But we hated to leave, both Ed and me. There was so much peace in the scene. So much comfortable beauty. We could have starved without noticing it, I think, if we could just have watched that strange picture....

I told my wife about it. She said it sounded pretty dopey. I ate supper and played with my kids, and went to bed early.

About two-thirty in the morning my phone rang. I picked it up—we don't

have a viziphone in our bedroom, of course—and said groggily, “Whassat? Huh?”

“Bill,” Garvin’s big voice busted out from the earpiece, “get over here on the double!”

“What happened? She blow up on us?” I was wide awake. I’d been dreaming about that glade in the odd forest. If I’d lost it—

“No, no. It’s unchanged. I mean it’s changed, but—oh, get over here and see for yourself!” He hung up.

I shot into my clothes, left a note for the wife with Garvin’s number on it, and hurtled my runabout across town and into the South Einsteinville suburbs. I rang the door chimes and Herman the robot opened the portal.

“Who put you together?” I gasped, starting back from the gaze of those eyes.

“Doctor Garvin reassembled me this evening, while watching his new trivideo set,” articulated Herman. “Will you step in? I take it you are Bill. Ed arrived three minutes forty seconds ago.”

I stepped in. Herman, clanking a trifle—I guess the Doc had done a kind of hasty, preoccupied job on him—switched down the collapsible stairs. I dashed up them and the robot followed.

There was Doc Garvin, with Ed beside him, hunched before the 44-N. I went over. “What’s happened?”

They both gestured at the screen without speaking.

IT WAS NIGHT in the glade. The colors were subdued and subtly changed; the waters (or more properly liquids, I guess) of the stream were dark with gleaming highlights, and the boles and leaves of the trees shone in the silvery light of two moons.

Two moons?

“Gaaah,” I said.

“Exactly. I watched twilight come

on, the stars come out, and then *they* appeared. I was damn near petrified. Here, take a chair.” I did so. “Does it mean anything to you, Bill?”

“It is another dimension, eh?”

“No, but another world. I think we all realized it, subconsciously, this afternoon,” he said slowly. “We sat here enthralled by the unearthly beauty of the place, and knew that it could not possibly be a glade on Terra.”

“Where is it?” I asked him, staring with all my eye muscles at the twin moons.

“Mars.”

I was speechless. Somehow another dimension would have surprised me less. Mars seems so far away....

“The moons are Deimos and Phobus, of course. In the—”

He never finished. I clamped down on his arm with one hand, while with the other I pointed shakily. “Look there,” I whispered. “Under that tree on the left. Just above the bend of the stream.”

“What is it?” hissed Ed.

“Ssh,” said the Doc. We were all silent. I suppose we thought the critter would hear us.

After a while it scuttled from one tree to the next. It moved like a man, except it was nervous-looking, and crouched over. It reminded me of something, but I couldn’t think what.

“If it would only come into the moonlight,” whispered Doc.

It did. Then I knew what it reminded me of.

My oldest boy has a book of cartoons at home. It’s a kind of history of comics, from the early part of the century right up to 1975. In the first section there are some pictures by a mighty fine and funny artist, of a little meek egg named Milquetoast. He’s always getting pushed around. He never hits back, except in his mind. He’s a shellfish without a shell. Quite

a character.

This Martian reminded me of Milquetoast.

We couldn't tell how big he was, naturally, because we didn't have any scale to judge by. We didn't know but what those trees were seven feet high, or maybe seven hundred. But somehow he looked about five foot five. He wore a kilt of dark red cloth. His legs beneath it were spindly and knock-kneed. His belly was a plump little ball, his chest might as well not have been there at all, his arms were crooked and as the poet says, the muscles in his scrawny arms were just like rubber bands. His face was the face of a little guy who has spent a lifetime being shoved around. His chin was retarded and hairless, his eyes looked watery. He was one miserable specimen. Indeed he was.

"This is a Martian?" gasped Ed incredulously.

"One of them guys we're always thinking will invade us?" I added.

Doc Garvin spluttered and laughed. "This is—this is the damndest thing I ever saw," he said. "There is about the lousiest-looking piece of humanity I ever laid eye on, really a dreg if ever there was a dreg. And it's on Mars! It's human, no matter how low it's sunk, and it's on *Mars*!"

We whooped and laughed with him. Honest, it was uproarious. We sat there the rest of the night, after the critter had scurried back into his forest after a surreptitious gulp from the stream, and every so often one of us would start to giggle again. I think I even heard a sympathetic chuckle from Herman the robot.

AT SEVEN we had breakfast. By then the Martian night was ending too. The moons had gone and the trees were turning gilt with sun. You could almost hear the Martian birds chirping, if there were any. We ate

off paper plates without budging from our seats. Garvin put out theories as to how come this human being on another planet, Ed demolished them, I put in my nickel's worth, and we had us a swell time. It all ended up that we didn't know why, how, or who, but we got quite a boot out of just guessing.

All that day we watched the set, and nothing happened. We didn't care. It was enough that we'd seen a Martian, and could continue to breathe in the marvelous scenery in which he lived.

"What do you suppose he's scared of?" asked Ed one time.

"Lord knows. Perhaps there are giant animals there that prey on his kind. Maybe he's a dawn man, or maybe he's a last remnant of a once-proud race of conquerors. Maybe—hell's fire! Maybe my expedition isn't the first from earth! Maybe back in the days of Atlantis they had atomic power, rockets, all that; maybe they sent men to Mars, and that poor fish is the last of their descendants."

"Could be," I said. "I wonder what he's afraid of?"

We kept wondering that all day. That night we notified our wives we'd be out till further notice (my spouse raised the devil), and took turns watching while the others slept. Nothing happened. Next day we talked some about trying to change the focal point of our miraculous set's waves. The discussion kind of petered out. I think we were all scared to tamper with it, for fear of knocking it out of whack.

Doc Garvin began to talk a lot about his nearing journey to Mars. Naturally Ed and I were pretty envious. We even asked, half-heartedly, if we could go along; but the crew was full and Doc reluctantly shook his head. I believe he'd have taken us if he could have figured a good excuse,

because the three of us were good friends by then.

Well, it got to be just two days till the flight. There hadn't been a minute in those long days and nights when one or another hadn't been glued to the screen of old 44-N. No further manifestations of life had shown up.

It was about five in the afternoon. Herman and I were playing chess and Ed was asleep. Garvin was shaving in front of the screen. First thing I knew he let out a yell that would have shattered the eardrums of a weaker man. I dropped my queen and covered the room in three bounces. "What is it?"

He didn't answer. He didn't have to. I saw for myself.

A woman had come into the glade. She was crossing it as I first looked at the screen. Right in the center she stopped and sat down cross-legged on the soft-looking ground. She had a little metal container like a basket slung over her arm, and now she proceeded to open it and take out things which may have been items of food. I never knew, because I never once glanced at them. My eyes were leaning out on my cheeks and so far as I was concerned the world had just vanished around me, leaving nothing but this Martian dame. Let me try to tell you why.

First there was her face. Well, anyway, that's what I first saw. It wasn't any more important than the rest of her, but I'll start with it.

It was topped with hair like sun-rays spun on a magic loom. There were enormous blue eyes, set just right: not too far apart, not too close together, under a forehead just the proper height. There was a nose that was what all noses have been trying to be since they first sprouted. There were lips... well, if anybody had tried to tell me there was a flaw in those lips, I'd have strangled him. With one

hand.

It was a perfect face. I don't care what your preference is, whether it's for plump-faced blondes or narrow-jawed brunettes, or whatever; this face would have struck you as just exactly what Nature had in mind in the first place. No argument about it, this doll had the finest face anybody ever laid glim on.

Gradually, like a kid with an ice cream sundae, I let my blazing gaze ooze down over the rest of her.

No, I won't go into detail. A man cannot go into detail over perfection even if he knows all the words there are, which I don't. It boils down to this—*wow!*

You know this show that's been running on Broadway for twenty-seven years, in which there is a song about a girl, of which one line goes: And she's broad where a broad should be broad....

Exactly.

SHE WAS dressed in something or other, very pretty I suppose, with short skirt and softly tailored this and that, but if I had to identify a stitch of that costume today I couldn't do it. I was occupied in gaping at her, not her adornments.

Lord knows how long the four of us—Herman was intrigued too—were paralyzed in front of that screen. Maybe hours. Anyhow, we none of us budged an inch until the Martian female gathered up whatever it was she had taken out of the container, put it back, stood up and strolled away, followed by three long gusty sighs and a metallic wheeze from Herman.

There was a long, long silence.

"Jee-hosaphat!" Ed said finally, stretching his cramped muscles. "Did I see it, or was I asleep?"

"Do you know what occurs to me, gentlemen?" asked Doc Garvin then. "That—terrific—that gorgeous—that

is the female of the species of which we saw a male some nights ago."

"My stars and rockets," I said intellectually.

We traded inane exclamations for a while, and then we noticed a movement among the trees. Instantly we were all agog as ever. And what should come skittering out but one of those damn little Milquetoast Martian men, looking over his shoulder and hustling to beat hell!

"Maybe we'll see what he's afraid of now," Ed grunted. "It must be on his heels."

It was.

It was another woman, a redhead this time, different but just as radiantly magnificent as the blonde; she was coming along unconcernedly, whistling, from the way her lovely mouth was puckered; and the man was running from her!

"He's not only nerve-ridden, he's nuts!" hissed Garvin.

"Amen," said I.

The girl saw the little critter just as he was leaping across the stream. She made a kind of cute disgusted face, and then smiled and shook her head, like you do at a child. We could have taken oath right then that she wouldn't have hurt the poor fish. It was just that he was afraid of everything, absolutely everything, even her.

We knew it. Sure, it was guessing, but when we saw that flawless face, and the sweet sort of pitying smile, we knew she was good clear through.

"It can't be a separate race," Doc was muttering in his half-shaved beard.

"You mean the man and the woman are the same race?"

"Oh, yes, that's obvious. Female dominant. Exceedingly. But so wonderfully!" He grinned. "What I meant was that Mars just couldn't have produced a human race corresponding so closely to Terra's. It must

be the result of previous space flight, maybe eons back in dusty time.... Look. They're obviously mammalian."

"Oh, I agree with that," said Ed.

"She's a spiced-up version of Terrestrial Woman. All the good physical traits perfected, all the bad obviously bred out. And that man...glory! What a mate for her!"

The redhead had been looking around sort of furtively. Now she opened her metal basket-container—they all seemed to carry them—and took out a rolled-up piece of paper, parchment, thin leather, or something of the sort. She unrolled it and held it at arms' length, and her big eyes got dreamy and lazy-looking. We couldn't see what was on the thing.

"I wonder what she's holding?" I asked inanely.

"Is she holding something?" said Ed hazily. "I hadn't noticed. You know, she's just what every man has been conjuring up in his best dreams for centuries. She's what these air-brush artists are trying to draw in the sleek sophisticated magazines. She's—"

He maundered on. Me, I was trying to get a look at what she was holding. I'm a lot older than Ed is, anyway, and more settled in my emotions, I guess.

Just then she turned around. She was whirling on her toes in an ecstasy of admiration for the picture. It *was* a picture. A picture of a big-chested, handsome, cocky-looking guy in a trench coat. A photograph.

A photograph of the American movie star, Errol Twofist!

I COULD have dropped right down through the floor with amazement. So could the Doc, I guess, because he made a noise like a perishing flounder. Ed was still admiring the tilt of her ears, or something.

"Do-do-do-do you know what that means?" bubbled Garvin.

"Sure. We were wrong about it being Mars. It's someplace on Earth."

"With the two moons?"

"Then it's in a dimension right next door to us, and they can reach through and photograph us." I was stubborn.

"Idiot!" said the Doc furiously. "Don't you suppose I've checked the position of the constellations? It's Mars all right. Now either they are the pioneers of space flight, who landed on Mars from Earth within two years at the outside—that's a *recent* photo—in a secret rocket, or else they have developed science to an extent where they can take pictures of things here on Terra as small as a human being."

He wiped a streaming forehead. Herman handed him another handkerchief solicitously. He went on. "The first theory's impossible. My ship is absolutely the first. There could not be any stretch of imagination have been a previous one. Hell, no, not in this civilization anyhow! So it means that they can penetrate space with their machines and photograph—maybe even listen to us! They must be Atlanteans, or Lemurians, or Moovians, or—anyway, they must have once originated on Terra; and grown to a titanicly intelligent peak, and then gone off for some reason to Mars. How's that for a theory?"

"I don't know about theories, Doc," I said. "I guess if you figure it that way, it's so. All I know is that these Martian dolls, who look just about perfect to my old eyes, carry around pin-up pictures, and those pictures are of Earth men. Brother!" I said. "What a situation! And you're going up there in a few hours!"

"Brother!" repeated Doc Garvin softly. "Oh, brother!"

The radiant redhead moved slowly out of the screen's limits, still gazing like a dreamy calf at good old Errol

Twofist.

"Doc," said Ed, waking up from his reverie, "if you don't find me a place on that jet job of yours, I'll stow away. I'll hang onto a fin. I'll dress up like Herman and clank aboard."

"I'll take you, Ed," said the scientist. "I'll take Bill too, if he'll come."

"Well," I said, "I got my wife and kids. I'm forty-two. I don't guess I'm a pin-up type myself, even to babes who've been living with jerks like little Jojo Milquetoast. I better hadn't go. But I'd sure like you to take Ed along. His wife wouldn't miss him, I bet."

I didn't say that mean-like, you understand. I really felt that Ed should go, and that his wife should let him. It was something about these Mars gals that made me feel that way, all noble, good, generous, kind, loving, splendid.... It worked on us all the same way. Like Garvin offering to take us. He didn't have a call to do that, really. We were just a couple of trivideo mechanics. But he wanted to share this beauty with us. He liked us. We liked him. We all liked everything. I guess true beauty does that to a guy.

Get me! A philosopher!

We started to talk about what Doc and Ed would do up on Mars.

"Of course, there's eugenics, genetics, biology," said the adventuring scientist. "We may find that we can't breed with these Martians. You see, I could be wrong about them being from here originally. Maybe Nature *did* work in the same lines on both planets. I can't say. But maybe, just maybe, we won't be able to beget children from these unions."

There wasn't any question but what there'd be unions.

"So what?" said Ed rudely. "Who wants a lot of kids cluttering up the glade when you can be alone with one

of them?"

Doc didn't say anything, but his eyes agreed with Ed.

WELL, TIME passed and it was the launching day, and we all said fond farewells, and Ed and the Doc took off in their rocket, with a couple of hundred young fellows for crew, and Herman the robot.

Following Doc Garvin's instructions, I then called in a lot of top brains of the country and showed them old 44-N, and explained what had happened.

For a month there was chaos. The whole world heard about our little window on Mars. Wheels turned, cogs meshed, things churned like crazy.

At the end of the month Garvin's house was full of guards, scientists, and television equipment. A new channel was inaugurated and twenty-four hours a day now you can flip to that channel and see a tri-di pic of our 44-N, flashing out the colorful, marvelous glade of the Martian woodland.

About six months after they blasted off, someone who was watching his screen, with an eagle eye caught a flash of Garvin's lads come zipping through the atmosphere in their silver streak. Some time later a whole covey of Martian girls went tearing across the screen, screeching and hollering and grinning from ear to lovely ear. It didn't take a giant intellect to guess that the news had reached them of a lot of their pin-up boys actually landing on Mars.

Some weeks later I was sitting at home watching the new channel. It was almost as though I was back in Doc's lab, with him and Ed beside me and Herman chinking in the background. I was getting drowsy when all of a sudden who should come strolling into the glade but good old Doc Garvin himself, not a pin-up snap-

shot! He looked around carefully, sort of laughed to himself, turned toward me and waved an arm and winked. I bet he recognized the place. He must have been looking for it.

On one arm was hanging a Martian gal with the finest equipment you ever laid orb on. She was staring up at Doc in that calfy way they used to look at their space-photos of Errol Twofist. It looked like she wanted to kiss him. He grinned, pointed straight at me, and led her offstage left. I think he knew I'd be watching the set. I know that wink and grin was for me.

Well, that's about all of the story, except for the menace part. I been thinking hard. I'm not used to it, but I forced myself.

What I'm thinking is, what about the future of mankind now?

All over the world they're knocking together spaceships on Garvin's plans. Big ones, medium ones, ships you could put a city block into and lose it, and even little homemade ones built by the crackpots. All over Terra guys are staring at their trivideo sets with one eye and reading plans of rockets with the other.

Within ten years every able-bodied fellow is going to be on Mars, on his way to Mars, or just getting ready to take off for Mars. And the way I look at it is, there aren't going to be many women going along. A, there isn't any incentive for them to go there like there is for the men. Those Martian men are a mess. B, most of our women are so sore at their husbands and boy friends over the Martian business that they'll stay home for spite. And C, there is that old question about Why take a ham sandwich to a banquet?

NOW WHEN they all get up there, there just isn't going to be any reason to come home. It's the land of

milk and honey for sure, heaven on Mars. So pretty soon what's left of the human race on Earth? A million old men and kids, and gosh knows how many million disgruntled, angry, embittered women, watching a red star in the night sky and swearing very unladylike.

Well, if this isn't a menacing situation, what is? Earth is going to be depopulated shortly, maybe within my own lifetime. Mars is going to be overrun with our fellows, all with radiant superhuman gals clinging to them. Even if there's only one girl for every ten men eventually up there, that won't matter. There won't be fights. The looks of the place just make you love everybody too much for that. They'll share amiably, I'll bet.

And what if the two races can't breed? One generation and we're *done*. And I haven't seen a sign of a kid yet on my screen, although Garvin's bunch have been there for almost a year.

Cooler heads will prevail, you say. Pal, there just aren't any cool heads left in the world!

Oh, of course, I'm not going. I got a wife, some pretty nice kids, and I'm forty-three going on -four. I'm set in my ways. You couldn't get me to Mars. Some of the guys like me, they'll stay. And we'll have us a lone-

ly little colony on a big lonesome world.

It's not sour grapes on my part, mind you. I could go up and grab me one of those lovelies like Garvin and Ed and the rest. They don't just go for the hairy-chested handsome-brute type. I've seen them walking through the glade with spacemen who looked like missing links. No kidding! Any Earth man has a chance. Even me...

No, I won't go. One of my pals has a ship about built, over at Falconhawk Aircraft. He keeps telling me I ought to go along with him. But I wouldn't leave the wife.

On the other hand, she's just as bad these days as the rest of the women, always nagging, nagging, pestering about why do I spend so much time looking at red and green trees, what do I see in those hussies, and so on. A guy gets almighty sick of hearing that day in and day out.

Of course I wouldn't desert the kids. They're growing up, be getting jobs soon, they could look after themselves, but I couldn't just walk out on them, like everybody else is doing.

No, I'm too stodgy and set in my rut to go shooting through space with my tongue lolling out, in pursuit of some foreign-planet dame. I like to think I got better sense.

On the other hand....

THE END

"SLAVE STATION"

★ By Leslie Phelps ★

SCIENTISTS have to refer more and more to literary allusions and homy down-to-earth similes to describe some of their devices. One of the most picturesque of recent times is the "slave station". Essentially this is an automatic mechanism for relaying a radio or television signal from one area to another without human interference.

It is an extremely important device

these days, with industry trying to blanket the nation completely with television waves. Since these waves only travel over lines of sight, a matter of less than a hundred and fifty miles, it is obviously impractical to have the necessary television stations to cover that amount of space. The answer is found in these small, low-powered stations which act as "slaves" to the big ones, faithfully reproducing ev-