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SYNOPSIS.

The inventive genius of Thomas A. Edison makes possible an attack of the earth upon Mars. This is done by a second invasion of the Martians, who are trying to relieve their overpopulation by breaking out of disease and not human effort. The first invasion was effected in an air ship, and an engine of destruction called the "Disintegrator," which is a cause of the constituent particles of any object at which it may be directed to so vibrate that the object will be immediately and completely disintegrated. A large fleet of air ships armed with disintegrators and manned by two thousand men, sets out from a certain point in the earth. The fleet arrived above the land of Thaumasia on Mars, and the Martians, who are of giant stature, human in form, but of repulsive aspect, cover the planet with a thick cloud of smoke, which the visitors pierce with their thunderbolts, and do much damage to the Edison fleet, which finally drops beneath the surface of the planet and engages the enemy in their ships, in close combat. The destruction of the Martians and the ships in the air, and the ships from the earth withdraw but sixty in number. The next move of the Martians is to proceed by Colonel Smith, an army officer. The majority of the ships are concerned at a certain point in the planet, and attention of Martians is held, while a few are sent to the other side of the planet to obtain some much needed provisions for the fleet. Colonel Smith, the Colonel and the narrator, approaching, hear strains of beautiful music issuing from a building. Entering, they are amazed to find a young girl—a human being—playing on a strange instrument for the amusement of several Martians. The latter are quickly dispatched with disintegrators, and the girl is taken back to the main squadron. Together with large quantities of compressed food that are found in the building, she is taken to the ship. It is perceived that her language is of human origin, and she is taken to the party time to time. The girl's remarkable narrative it would appear that the Martians had visited the earth, had built the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Aina's forefathers were carried back to Mars, and they and their descendants had been kept in slavery until, with the exception of Aina, they were all massacred on the arrival of the fleet from the earth. Aina discloses a way by which the Martians can be drawn to the surface of the planet by the water—used at another season for irrigating purposes in the desert. The melting of the snows around the South pole. The fleet leaves Delmos for Mars, keeping always in the shadow of the planet. The invaders arrive, without being detected, above the power house that controls the mechanism of the gates. It is strongly guarded by an electrical net work and other devices that it would mean death to tamper with, but the Martians, Mr. Edison, Colonel Smith and Sidney Phillips, of whom the Martians are very fond, rivals for the hand of Aina, and the girl herself, descend safely from one of the ships and make their way to the power house in hand, toward the power house.

XXII. We had one very great advantage. The Martians had evidently placed so much confidence in the electric net-work which surrounded the power house that they never dreamed of enemies' being able to penetrate it—at least without giving warning of their coming.

But the hole which we had blown in had been made noiselessly, and Mr. Edison believed, since no enemies had appeared, that our operations had not been betrayed by any automatic signal to watchers inside the building.

Consequently we were free to go on to think that we now stood within the line of defence, in which they reposed the greatest confidence, without their having the least suspicion of our presence.

Aina assured us that on the occasion of her former visit to the power house there had been but two sentinels at the entrance. At the inner end of a long passage leading to the interior, she said, there were two more. Besides these there were three or four Martian engineers watching the machinery in the interior of the building. A number of air ships were supposed to be on guard around the structure, but probably their vigilance had been relaxed, because not long ago the Martians sent an expedition against Ceres which had been so successful that the power of that planet was carried down by Mars had for the present been destroyed.

Supposing us to have been annihilated in the recent battle among the clouds, they would have no fear or cause for vigilance on our account.

The entrance to the great structure was low—at least when measured by the stature of the Martians. Evidently the intention was that only one person at a time should find room to pass through it.

Drawing cautiously near, we discerned the outlines of two gigantic forms standing in the darkness, one on either side of the door. Colonel Smith whispered to me:

"If you will take the fellow on the right, I will attend to the other one."

Adjusting our aim as carefully as was possible in the gloom, Colonel Smith and I simultaneously discharged our disintegrators, sweeping them rapidly up and down in the manner which had become familiar to us when endeavoring to destroy one of the gigantic Martians with a single stroke. And so successful were we that the two sentinels disappeared as if they had been ghosts of the night.

Instantly we all hurried forward and entered the door. Before us extended a long straight passage, brightly illuminated by a number of electric candles. Its polished sides gleamed with blood-red reflections, and the gallery terminated at a distance of two or three hundred feet, with an opening into a large chamber beyond, on the farther side of which we could see part of a gigantic and complicated mass of machinery.

Making as little noise as possible, we pushed ahead along the passage, but when we had arrived within a distance of a dozen paces from the inner end, we stopped, and Colonel Smith, getting down upon his knees, crept forward until he had reached the inner end of the passage. There he peered cautiously around the edge into the chamber, and, turning his head a moment later, raised the constituent particles of any object at which it may be directed to so vibrate that the object will be immediately and completely disintegrated.

The chamber was an immense square room at least a hundred feet in height and 400 feet on a side, and almost filling the wall opposite to us was an intricate display of wheels, levers, rods and polished plates. This we had no doubt was one of the great engines which opened and shut the great gates that could dam an ocean.

"There is no one in sight," said Colonel Smith.

"Then we must act quickly," said Mr. Edison.

"Where," he said, turning to Aina, "is the opening by means of which you saw the Martian close the gates?"

Aina looked about in bewilderment. The mechanism before us was so complicated that even an expert mechanic would have been excusable for finding himself unable to understand it.

"Quick," said Mr. Edison, "where is it?"

The girl in her confusion ran this way and that, gazing hopelessly upon the machinery, but evidently utterly unable to help us.

To remain here inactive was not merely to invite destruction for ourselves, but was sure to bring certain failure upon the purpose of the expedition. All of us began instantly to look about in search of the proper handle, seizing every crank and wheel in sight and striving to turn it.

"Stop that!" shouted Mr. Edison, "you may set the whole thing wrong. Don't touch anything until we have found the right lever."

But it found that seemed to most of us now utterly beyond the power of man.

It was at this critical moment that the wonderful depth and reach of Mr. Edison's mechanical genius displayed itself. He stepped back, ran his eyes quickly over the whole immense mass of wheels, handles, bolts, bars and levers, paused for an instant, as if making up his mind, then said decidedly:

"There it is," and stepping quickly forward, he touched a small wheel, and a dozen others, all furnished at the circumference with handles like those of a pilot's wheel, and, giving it a quick wrench, turned it half way around.

At that instant a startling shout fell upon our ears. There was a thunderous clatter behind us, and turning we saw three gigantic Martians rushing forward.

"Sweep them! Sweep them!" cried Colonel Smith, as he brought his disintegrator to bear. Mr. Phillips and I instantly followed his example, and the three Martians fell dead.

The effect of what he was doing became apparent in less than half a minute. A shiver ran through the mass of machinery and shook the entire building.

"Look! look!" cried Sidney Phillips, who had stepped a little apart from the others.

We all ran to this side, and found ourselves in front of a great window which, opening through the side of the house, gave a view of what lay before us. There, gleaming in the electric lights, we saw the Syrtis Major, its waters washing high against the walls of the vast power house. Running directly out from the shore, there was an immense metallic gate at least 400 yards in length and rising 300 feet above the present level of the water.

This great gate was slowly swinging upon an invisible hinge in such a manner that in a few minutes it would evidently stand across the current of the Syrtis Major at right angles.

Beyond was a second gate, which was moving in the same manner. Further on was a third gate, and then another, and another, as far as the eyes could reach, evidently extending in an unbroken series completely across the great strait.

As the gates, with accelerated motion when the current of water changed together, we beheld a spectacle that almost stopped the beating of our hearts.

The great Syrtis seemed to gather itself for a moment, and then it leaped upon the obstruction and hurried its waters into one vast foaming geyser that seemed to shoot a thousand feet skyward.

But the metal gates withstood the shock, though buried from our sight in the seething white mass, and the barred waters instantly swirled round in the level of our window and beginning to inundate the power house before we fairly comprehended our peril.

"We have done the work," said Mr. Edison, smiling grimly. "Now we had better get out of this before the flood bursts upon us."

into the great engine room, the water had risen half way to our knees. Colonel Smith, catching Aina under his arm, led the way. The roar of the maddened torrent behind deafened us.

As we ran through the passage, the water followed us, with a wicked swishing sound, and in five seconds it was above our knees, in ten seconds up to our waists.

The great danger now was that we should be swept from our feet, and once down in that torrent there would have been little chance of our ever getting our heads above its level. Supporting ourselves as best we could with the aid of the walls, we partly ran and were partly swept along, until we reached the outer end of the passage and emerged into the open air, the flood swirling about our shoulders.

Here there was an opportunity to clutch some of the ornamental work surrounding the doorway, and thus we managed to stay our mad progress, and gradually to work out of the current of the released water, which we had to wade through.

Now as he hung over our heads, and saw the water up to our very necks and still swiftly rising, he shouted again:

"Catch hold, for God's sake!"

The three men who were with him in the ship seconded his cry, and we were fairly grasped the ropes, so rapidly was the flood rising, we were already afloat.

Now as he hung over our heads, and saw the water up to our very necks and still swiftly rising, he shouted again:

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grove of trees had allowed a flood of light to stream upon the scene from a cluster of electric lamps on a distant portion of the bank on the Syrtis that had not yet given way that he caught sight of us.

Immediately he began to shout to attract our attention, but in the uproar we could not hear him. Getting together all the ropes that he could lay his hands on, he steered the ship to a point directly over us, and then dropped down within a few yards of the sill of the flood.

Now as he hung over our heads, and saw the water up to our very necks and still swiftly rising, he shouted again:

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rection, toward the east, would have considerably farther to go before reaching the neighborhood of the Lake of the Sun. It, too, would involve hundreds of great canals as it advanced, and would come plunging upon the Lake of the Sun and its surrounding forts and cities, probably about half a day later than the arrival of the deluge that traveled toward the west.

Now that we had let the awful destroyer loose we almost shrank from the thought of the consequences which we had produced. How many millions we could not even guess. Many of the victims, as far as we knew, might be entirely innocent of enmity toward us, or of the evil which had been done to our native planet. But this was a case in which several of the most powerful disintegrators were directed upon the ship which had executed the stratagem and, reduced to a wreck, it dropped, whirling like a broken kite until it fell into the flood beneath.

Still the Martians' ships came flocking in ever greater numbers from all directions. They made desperate attempts to attain the level at which we hung above them. This was impossible, but many, getting an impetus by a swift run in the denser portion of the atmosphere beneath, succeeded in rising so high that they could discharge their electric artillery with considerable effect. Others, with more or less success, repeated the manoeuvre of the ship which had first attacked us, and thus the battle became gradually more general and more fierce, until, in the course of an hour or two, our squadron found itself engaged with probably a thousand airships, which blazed with incessant lightning strokes, and were able, all too frequently, to do us serious damage.

But on our part the battle was waged with a cool determination and a consciousness of insuperable advantage which boded ill for the enemy. Only three or four of our sixty electrical ships were seriously damaged, while the work of the disintegrators upon the crowded fleet that floated beneath us was a fearful one.

Our strokes fell thick and fast on all sides. It was like firing into a flock of birds that could not get away. Notwithstanding all our efforts they were practically all our mercy. Shattered into unrecognizable fragments, hundreds of the airships were dropping from their great height to be swallowed up in the boiling waters.

Yet they were game to the last. They made every effort to get at us, and in their frenzy they seemed to discharge their bolts without much regard as to whether friends or foes were being struck. Our eyes were nearly blinded by the ceaseless glare beneath us, and the uproar was indescribable.

At length, after the fearful contest had lasted for at least three hours, it became evident that the strength of the enemy was beginning to weaken. Nearly the whole of their immense fleet of airships had been destroyed, or so far damaged that they were barely able to float. Just so long, however, as they showed signs of resistance we continued to pour our merciless fire upon them, and the signal to cease firing was not given until the airships which had escaped serious damage began to flee in every direction.

"Thank God, the thing is over," said Mr. Edison. "We have got the victory at last, but how we shall make use of it is something that at present I do not see."

"But will they not renew the attack?" asked some one.

"I do not think they can," was the reply. "We have destroyed the very flower of their fleet."

"And better than that," said Colonel Smith, "we have destroyed their clan; we have made them afraid. Their discipline is gone."

But this was only the beginning of our victory. The floods below were achieving a still greater triumph, and now that we had conquered the airships, we dropped within a few hundred feet of the surface of the water, and then turned our faces westward in order to follow the advance of the deluge and see whether, as we had hoped, it would overwhelm our enemies in the very centre of their power.

In a little while we had overtaken the front wave, which was still devastating everything. We saw it bursting the banks of the canals, sweeping away forests of gigantic trees, and swallowing cities and villages, leaving behind nothing but a broad expanse of swirling and eddying waters, which, in consequence of the prevailing red hue of the vegetation and the soil, looked as, shuddering, we gazed down up it, like an ocean of blood, flecked with foam and steaming with the escaping life of the planet from whose veins it gushed.

As we skirted the southern borders of the continent the same dreadful scenes which we had beheld on the coast of Aeria presented themselves. Crowds of refugees thronged the high border of the land and struggled with one another for a foothold against the continually rising flood.

We saw, too, fleeing in every direction, but rapidly fleeing before our approach, many airships, evidently crowded with Martians, but not armed either for offence or defence. These, of course, we did not disturb, for merciless as our proceedings seemed even to ourselves, we had no intention of making war upon the innocent, or upon those who had no means to resist. What we had done it had seemed to us necessary to do, but henceforth we were resolved to take no more lives if it could be avoided.

Thus, during the remainder of that day, all the following night and all of the next day, we continued upon the heels of the advancing flood.

The second night we could perceive ahead of us the electric lights covering the land of Thaumasia, in the midst of which lay the Lake of the Sun. The flood would be upon us by daybreak, and, assuming that the demoralization produced by the news of the coming of the waters, which we were aware had hours before been flashed to the capital of Mars, would prevent the Martians from effectively manning their forts, we thought it safe to hasten on with the flagship, and one or two others, in advance of the water, and to hover over the Lake of the Sun in the darkness, in order that we might watch the deluge perform its awful work in the morning.

Completely surrounded as I have before remarked, was a broad, oval land, about 1,800 miles across, having the Lake of the Sun exactly in its centre. From this lake, which was four or five hundred miles in diameter, and circular in outline, many canals radiated, as straight as the spokes of a wheel, in every direction, and connected it with the surrounding seas.

Like all the other Martian continents, Thaumasia lay below the level of the sea, except toward the south, where it fringed the ocean.

Presently we saw one of the largest of their ships manoeuvring in a very peculiar manner, the purpose of which we did not at first comprehend. Its forward portion commenced slowly to rise, until it pointed upward like the nose of a fish approaching the surface of the water. The moment it was in this position, an electrical bolt was darted from its prow, and one of our vessels received a shock which, although it did not prove fatal to the vessel itself, killed two or three men aboard it, disarranged its apparatus, and rendered it for the time being useless.

"Ah, that's their trick, is it?" said Mr. Edison. "We must look out for that. Whenever you see one of the airships beginning to stick its nose up after that fashion, blaze away at it."

An order to this effect was transmitted throughout the squadron. At the same time several of the most powerful disintegrators were directed upon the ship which had executed the stratagem and, reduced to a wreck, it dropped, whirling like a broken kite until it fell into the flood beneath.

Still the Martians' ships came flocking in ever greater numbers from all directions. They made desperate attempts to attain the level at which we hung above them. This was impossible, but many, getting an impetus by a swift run in the denser portion of the atmosphere beneath, succeeded in rising so high that they could discharge their electric artillery with considerable effect. Others, with more or less success, repeated the manoeuvre of the ship which had first attacked us, and thus the battle became gradually more general and more fierce, until, in the course of an hour or two, our squadron found itself engaged with probably a thousand airships, which blazed with incessant lightning strokes, and were able, all too frequently, to do us serious damage.

But on our part the battle was waged with a cool determination and a consciousness of insuperable advantage which boded ill for the enemy. Only three or four of our sixty electrical ships were seriously damaged, while the work of the disintegrators upon the crowded fleet that floated beneath us was a fearful one.

Our strokes fell thick and fast on all sides. It was like firing into a flock of birds that could not get away. Notwithstanding all our efforts they were practically all our mercy. Shattered into unrecognizable fragments, hundreds of the airships were dropping from their great height to be swallowed up in the boiling waters.

Yet they were game to the last. They made every effort to get at us, and in their frenzy they seemed to discharge their bolts without much regard as to whether friends or foes were being struck. Our eyes were nearly blinded by the ceaseless glare beneath us, and the uproar was indescribable.

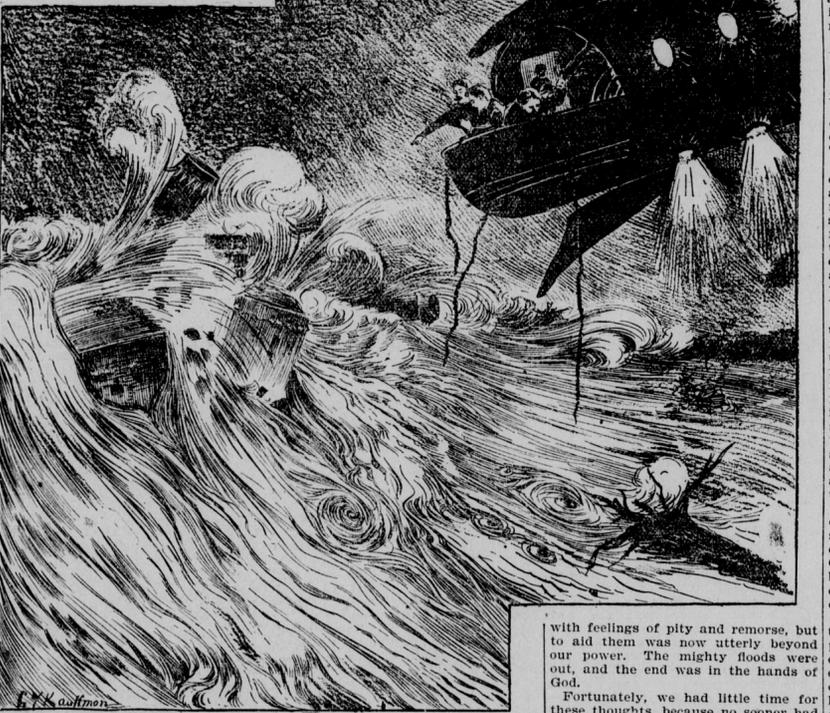
At length, after the fearful contest had lasted for at least three hours, it became evident that the strength of the enemy was beginning to weaken. Nearly the whole of their immense fleet of airships had been destroyed, or so far damaged that they were barely able to float. Just so long, however, as they showed signs of resistance we continued to pour our merciless fire upon them, and the signal to cease firing was not given until the airships which had escaped serious damage began to flee in every direction.

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At That Instant the Immense Power House Gave Way.

Smith lifting the form of Aina, who had fainted, above the surface of the surging water, while Sidney Phillips stood by his side and aided him in supporting the unconscious girl.

"We stayed a little too long," was the only sound I heard from Mr. Edison.

The huge bulk of the power house partially protected us against the force of the current, and the water spun around us in great eddies. These swept us this way and that, but yet we managed to cling together, determined not to be separated in death if we could avoid it.

Suddenly a cry rang out directly above our heads:

"Jump for your lives, and be quick!"

At the same instant the ends of several ropes splashed into the water.

We glanced upward, and there, within three or four yards of our heads, hung the electrical ship, which we had left moored at the top of the trees, and another, as far as the eyes could reach, evidently extending in an unbroken series completely across the great strait.

As the gates, with accelerated motion when the current of water changed together, we beheld a spectacle that almost stopped the beating of our hearts.

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