

## **The Martian Crusade Ch. 2**

"Mary!"

The brown haired fifteen year old girl named Mary Sue looked up at the shouted call and smiled at seeing one of her fellow mage candidates. "Robert!" she waved back her greeting. "What is it?"

Robert Jerome was a friend, someone Mary had got along with surprisingly well in spite of his being four years older. His rail thin build and large green eyes under his head of sleek dark brown hair often put Mary in mind of an overexcited ferret. Not that she'd ever be so rude as to say it out loud, especially to someone who'd been so kind to her during their training for the Unified States' 42nd Mage Wing.

Robert jogged up to her, his mouth already firing off words in his excitement. "Word just came out, there's going to be a big radio announcement. We're all expected to be there."

"An announcement? What about?"

"Like they tell us nuggets shi- uh, anything at all." Robert had a naturally foul mouth that he'd self-censor in Mary's presence, something Mary always found amusing. Now though, he leaned forward and tapped his nose. "It doesn't take too much thinking to guess what it's gonna be about though."

Mary did a bit of thinking of her own, and her face clouded over. "Those rumors coming out of the Rockies?"

Over the past few weeks, more and more outlandish rumors had been coming in. Everything from demons from hell to alien invasion to the South rising again led by the ghost of Stonewall Jackson. The rumors only seemed to agree on two things. First, that there was an unknown armed force operating in Unified States territory. Second, and more worryingly, these forces seemed to be operating all throughout the Rocky Mountains. While getting a force that deep into the country's borders was theoretically possible using aircraft and magic, to do so in sufficient numbers to be observed in six states meant either a terrifyingly high level of enemy coordination or a horrifyingly low level of border security. The situation had reportedly gotten bad enough that overland transport routes between the eastern and western halves of the country were being threatened, an extremely serious state of affairs.

Mary herself had another reason to be concerned. She had never made it a secret that her primary reason for joining the armed forces was to fight against the Empire, that cruel European hegemon that had claimed her father's life and captured her homeland. If the US got distracted chasing ghosts in the Rockies, then her own opportunity to fight for the freedom of her people would disappear, especially with the Empire seemingly on the verge of total victory.

Robert nodded his head in agreement to Mary's words. "What else could it be, really? The papers have been going crazy and it's almost all you hear about on the radio. More than likely they've finally figured out what's going on."

Mary shrugged. "I hope they did more than figure it out, I hope they put a stop to it. After all, there's a war going on that we're training to fight in. We can't afford distractions."

"Don't think of it that way, Mary. Instead think of it as a chance for our army to get some warming up. After all, whoever it is causing trouble in the mountains, they can't be as bad as the Empire." Robert brightened up as the idea seemed to grip his imagination. "Hey, we're most of the way through training here. Think there's a chance they'll deploy us to help mop up these jokers?"

Mary shook her head in disbelief. "You're dreaming, Robert. Why on earth would they send a bunch of half-baked rookies like us when they've got a dozen other wings to call on? Unless whoever is causing trouble manages to survive for another six months, I doubt we're going to catch any of that action. When is this radio announcement supposed to happen anyway?"

"Oh right! Everyone's to assemble at the main briefing room at six."

"Six? Then I'd better get going, I've got some things I want to get done before then. I'll see you there."

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Six in the evening saw all the personnel on base that were not on essential duties gathered in the main briefing room around a large radio. The camp commandant was there with his top officers and looking particularly grim - Mary suddenly had a sinking feeling that he'd been briefed beforehand, and it wasn't good news. Along with the camp officers, there were a dozen mage officers and over two times as many mage trainees like herself, and several support staff like the engineering and communication officers.

At precisely six, the music on the radio came to an abrupt halt. *"Attention citizens of the Unified States. We have now an extremely important announcement directly from our honored President, Victor Coolidge."*

Immediately after a new voice came on, one Mary vaguely recognized.

*"Citizens of the Unified States! It is with a heavy heart that I stand before you today to announce that our fine nation is under attack by an outside force.*

*Many of you have already heard rumors of an unknown force operating in the Rocky Mountains and attacking our citizens. Thanks to expeditions launched by the brave men and women of the 1st Infantry Division, the 36th Armored Cavalry, and the 24th Mage Division among others, we have confirmed and engaged hostile elements at multiple locations. These engagements were*

*fierce and not without casualties. But, in the end, our forces prevailed and succeeding in pushing back the enemy on multiple fronts.*

*However, the enemy is far from defeated. Ladies and gentlemen, please understand that what I am about to say next is the result of much careful study by the top scientific minds of our nation. After examining the remains of the hostile forces, it is the consensus of the United States government that this enemy is of **extraterrestrial** origin.*

*No, this is not a mistake or a joke. Newspapers tomorrow will carry pictures of these invaders, but let me assure you now, this enemy is not and never was human. According to our scientists, the appearance of these aliens can be traced back to the unexpected meteor showers this past June. It is now believed that the meteors were not inert rock, but landing craft carrying these invaders to our soil. The commanders of the expeditionary forces have confirmed the existence of at least one alien stronghold deep in the Colorado Rockies, and it is believed there are several others, corresponding to the predicted landing site of their craft.*

*If you are wondering what it is these creatures want, I am forced to answer that no one knows. All efforts at communication thus far have failed. Their only purpose seems to be destruction and chaos. They make no attempt to negotiate, they do not seem to discriminate between civilians and soldiers, nor do they respect flags of truce.*

*Furthermore, we are far from the only country under threat. Our government has received reports of alien attacks from South America, Africa, and Asia. We have confirmed alien sightings along the Mexican border. Even now, our southern neighbors are locked in a bitter struggle of their own as alien forces encroach on their very capital.*

*The situation in Central America is also very serious. Not only has the country of Gran Colombia been thrown into chaos, but the alien incursion seriously threatens the vital Panama Canal. Even now, our Caribbean fleet sails for Central America to reinforce this crucial lifeline of American commerce.*

*In the face of unrelenting hostility from this alien menace, I have no choice but to declare a state of national emergency. All active forces are being called to readiness, and all reserves are being mobilized. The armed forces will be expanded to meet the various threats against our interests both foreign and domestic.*

*Ladies and gentlemen, I will not lie, this cowardly and unprovoked attack has hurt us. Many are our citizens who have died, often caught unprepared in their homes by an enemy that seems to know nothing not just of the laws of war, but the most basic of civilized conduct.*

*But, my fellow citizens, make no mistake. **We will prevail!** Even now our courageous forces push back these creatures to their mountain holdfasts. It may take time, but soon enough, this invasion will be crushed. I know not what foul pit of hell spawned these creatures, but with God on our side these vermin will be sent back to the hell from whence they came! We are the brave! The free! We are the Unified States of America! We are the greatest nation in the world, and these*

*unholy invaders will feel our wrath, so I swear on my honor as your President! And to our brave soldiers I say Godspeed and good hunting!"*

As the President went off the air, the regular announcer came back with follow up announcements. Mary didn't get to hear any of those because the commandant reached over and switched off the radio.

The grizzled officer looked out among the stunned soldiers and growled, "All right boys and girls, as you can tell, the shit's hit the fan and in a whole new way, and we've all got our marching orders. Overall, the strategy is to fortify our borders against any outside incursions while we crush the squids holed up in the Rockies. Yeah, I said squids, and you'll call 'em that too once you get to see the pictures. We're also supposed to be fortifying Panama, but that's the Navy's headache.

As for us here? Well, for starters, your European tour's been cancelled. I know you've all been looking forward to showing the Krauts what for, but all that's out the window while there's a single squid alive within American borders. Also, we're pushing all of you out early. We're going to get you nuggets ready to fly in six weeks, not six months. Your new lesson plans are already going out. As for why, well turns out the squids have some pretty fancy gear that works way better in mountain terrain than our own armor. Mages are the best bet we have for taking them out without racking up a butcher's bill, so we need all the mages we can get. Now, Squadron A...."

As the commandant continued to brief individual squadrons and flights, Mary sat there frozen in shock. Aliens! Creatures from the depths of space, here to kill them all! All of a sudden, her vengeance against the Empire seemed so petty and unimportant. Not when death and destruction was on her very doorstep. Uncertain of what else she could do, she fell back on childhood habit and began to pray. "Our Lord in Heaven..."

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### **Excerpt from Lionel Hart's History of the Extraterrestrial War**

*...Ultimately, success of the Martian's initial invasion relied almost entirely on speed and surprise. Before the nations of the world were even aware of it, several resources vital to the Martian military machine had been occupied and were producing at rates far beyond anything Earth technology could achieve. It is now obvious that the Martians had carried out a very careful geological survey of our planet prior to their arrival. Every major Martian landing was aimed at a rich concentration of ore or oil. Furthermore, each landing team carried the raw materials necessary to complement local resources in order to build their weapons of war.*

*Fortunately for the human race, sheer distance worked to limit the forces the Martians could land on our world. Given the technological disparity, if the Martians had been able to land their weapons of war en masse, the initial strike may have crippled humanity's ability to resist. Fortunately, the need to build up their forces from local manufacture meant the governments of our world had time to adjust to this new reality.*

*In areas where large, organized forces were near at hand the alien forces were swiftly contained. The most notable such example would be the Unified States, where in spite of multiple large landings, the American forces were able to corral the invaders after a few months of fighting, even if actually destroying the enemy strongholds would take a lot longer.*

*However, in large parts of Asia, South America, and Africa, the situation was not nearly so favorable. The aliens were able to operate largely unchecked in the sparsely populated jungles of Africa and the steppes of Central Asia, and large parts of South America fell early into alien hands. Even if their brethren elsewhere were being destroyed, the invaders in these regions successfully set up massive armaments complexes designed to churn out the war machines that would eventually threaten the whole world....*