

**THE WIZARD OF MENLO PARK**

**By John Judy**

**(Lights up on THOMAS ALVA EDISON in his lab.)**

EDISON

Bill! Fred! Get in here, lickety-split! I've got something to show you!

**(BILL DICKSON and FRED OTT enter.)**

BILL

What is it, Mr. Edison?

FRED

Another one of your crazy doo-hickeys, boss?

EDISON

You don't know the half of it, boys! Feast your eyes on this: "The Kinetoscope, the Modern Marvel of 1891!"

FRED

It looks like a box with a monacle on it.

BILL

What's it do, Mr. E?

EDISON

It records pictures, my young friends, pictures that move!

FRED

Oh. Ya mean like a Zoetrope?

BILL

A magic lantern?

FRED

A chrono-photographe?

BILL

Yeah, the Frenchies been workin' on that one for years.

FRED

'Fraid you're a little late to the ball on this one, boss.

**(EDISON smacks them both.)**

EDISON

I'll "ball" you, you two numbskulls, and not in a good way! The magic lantern's a piece of poop and all those Frenchies are good for is makin' whoopee with their mouths! Why with this little beauty I'm going record pictures that'll build a bridge to the twentieth century!

BILL

What kind of pictures, sir?

FRED

Men walking?

BILL

Horses running?

FRED

I saw that one in New York.

BILL

Me too. Twice in three minutes.

FRED

I was sad it had to end.

EDISON

That's my whole point, you silly rum-pots! With the Kinetoscope you can make moving pictures that look better and last longer! You can tell stories, like they do on the stages and bawdy houses!

BILL

Stories, Mr. E?

EDISON

Stories, boys! Stories like this!

**(EDISON pulls a script from his jacket and slaps it into FRED's hands.)**

FRED (reading)

"Serpents on a Dirigible..." Interesting title.

EDISON

I wrote it myself! In the privy!

BILL

Mr. Edison... Tom... I have to ask, sir... Did you invent this Kinetoscope just so you could tell the story of "Serpents on a Dirigible?"

EDISON

Boys, I tell you, it all just came together the way great ideas do! The light-bulb! The phonograph! "Serpents on a Dirigible!"

FRED

What's it about?

EDISON

Serpents! On a dirigible! See? They're on the dirigible!

BILL

Y'know Fred, I think I hear one of those new-fangled telephones ringing.

EDISON

Hear me out, damn you! Picture it! A mighty dirigible, filled with explosive hydrogen gas, soaring dozens of feet above the Earth! And in its fragile, gondola-like undercarriage: Serpents! Lots and lots of hungry serpents!

FRED

A hovering gondola full of serpents?

EDISON

Well... There'd be people too. Obviously.

BILL

Of course.

EDISON

Couple of kids. Some honeymooners. Maybe a crazy Confederate vet who could bring on the serpents.

FRED

But wouldn't they hear the serpents before they got on the dirigible? I mean, serpents hiss, right?

EDISON

Well, what if the serpents were muzzled to keep them quiet?

BILL

But they'd still have to be sort of heavy, wouldn't they, sir? In order to cause any meaningful harm you'd have to have quite a few serpents on account of them being not very precise and that might prevent the dirigible from having enough lift..

FRED

Good point, Bill. I figure you're trying to convey a sort of "man versus the elements" morality tale, right sir?

EDISON

Yes! Yes! Man, self-elevated to the heavens in his dirigible and yet laid low by the primordial serpent! And, there's a sassy negro too! But he can be played by a Jew! And he says, "Lawsy, lawsy, I wants these confounded serpents off this confounded dirigible!" And then he's eaten by the serpents and the Ku Klux Klan rides into the rescue as they always do!

BILL

But how do the Klan's horses...?

EDISON

They're in another dirigible! Just read the treatment!

FRED

Mr. E, with all due respect, I think you've gone soft in the melon. You'll never replace the vitality of the living stage with this two-dimensional shadowplay.

BILL

I'm afraid I'm with Fred on this one, sir. Any live theatre no matter how small will always command the loyalty of the crowd over the sterile modernity of spectacle.

FRED

You're a great man, Mr. Edison, but maybe you should focus on something more useful than moving pictures and "Serpents on a Dirigible."

EDISON

Well, I suppose I could always finish my work on the steam-powered artificial vagina.

BILL & FRED

Here, here! Let's fire it up!

**(BLACKOUT)**