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A THEMATIC STUDY OF H. G. WELLS'S "THE WAR OF THE WORLDS"

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we have discussed about the book of H G Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. In this book the Martians invade England, landing in ten cylinders at twenty-four-hour intervals, terrorizing the countryside and devastating the heart of London. It is perhaps the most plausible of Wells's romances, for at the time it was thought that Mars might be inhabitable and that it was older than the earth. It could well serve, then, as the site of beings who antedate humanity.

Keywords: - Martians, Extraterrestrial, Antedate, Tentacles.

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INTRODUCTION

*The War of the Worlds* was originally published in *Pierson's Magazine* in 1897 and was issued as a novel the following year. Even after the passage of more than a century, it has not lost its interest. Its story has become an integral part of the British culture and is frequently retold in graphic novels and films. In 1938, it became part of one of the greatest and most horrifying media events of all times. The Mercury Theatre on the Air, headed by twenty-three-year-old Orson Wells, broadcast over the radio an adaptation of the book. The broadcast was so realistic that it caused widespread Public Panic, Mob Violence and looting. Until the night of that broadcast, few people realized the power of broadcast media to make whole populations feel powerless when faced with breaking events.

THE STUDY

Book I: The Coming of the Martians

At the time of publication it was classified as a scientific romance, like his earlier novel *The Time Machine*. *The War of the Worlds* has been both popular and influential, spawning half a dozen feature films, radio, dramas, various comic book adaptations, a television series and sequels or parallel stories by other authors. It has even influenced the work of scientists, notably *Robert Hutchings Goddard*.

John St. Loe Strachey wrote in his review: "As a writer of scientific romances Wells has never been surpassed....." Even when Mr. Wells in more awful and most eccentric, there is something human about his characters."<sup>1</sup> The war which ensues between men and Martians is melodramatic and shamefully one-sided. The

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strangers fight in spider-like engines, a hundred feet high, which stride along with the speed of a limited express. The Foreigners are from the Planet Mars.

The Martians suffer self-defeat because they do not have the immunity system to fight against the bacteria on the earth. Here Wells has hinted on the existence of bacteria and their harmful effect on mankind. The story certainly is a fantasy but it tells us about the scientific truth that man must resist himself from the invasion of bacteria. People from other planets are less dangerous than bacteria.

The story starts with some very general statements about life before the war, such as the famous opening line: "No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than Man's and yet as Mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water."<sup>2</sup>

At First, we don't know who is talking. Is this an omniscient narrator or a character in the story? But we do know a war is coming because the chapter title tells us. Also, "War" is in the book's title--- so, really, there are lots of clues that war is coming. We know that, but the people on Earth don't know it.

The narrator gives us some background information on Mars:

"The Planet Mars, revolves about the sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it receives from the sun is barely half of that received by this world. It must be, if the nebular hypothesis has any truth, older than our world; and long before this earth ceased to be molten, life upon its surface must have begun its course. The fact that it is scarcely one-seventh of the volume of the earth must have accelerated its cooling to the temperature at which life could be begin. It has air and water and all that is necessary for the support of animated existence."<sup>3</sup>

The real question is whether the Martians have considered invading earth for its natural resources. Now, we might not want the Martians to invade and kill us and steal all our stuff, but the narrator reminds us that that's exactly what humans have done to each other- like when the British Pretty much wiped out the Tasmanians. So who are we to complain?

The narrator notes that people saw some flashes of light on Mars, but didn't know what they meant. So far the narrator has described people as dangerous and as a little shortsighted. It seems that this is not going to be a feel-good story that makes us proud to be human. By the way, this all happened six years ago, so the narrator knows how everything turns out all right. The narrator never tells us what year it all started. He mentions 1894 as the year some great light was seen on Mars, but that light is not the flashes he mentioned.

Finally, the narrator reveals himself as some one in the story, though someone without a name. The narrator meets the astronomer Ogilvy, who invites him to the observatory to see the weird lights on Mars. The night at the observatory is entirely ordinary by our human standards. The narrator drinks some water because he is thirsty and the people in the villages are fast asleep. The narrator then contrasts this ordinary stuff with the coming of the Martians. He notes that things are hunky-dory now, but there is some "thing coming to Earth to bring struggle and calamity and death."<sup>4</sup>

Ogilvy doesn't believe that Mars has intelligent life. He thinks the strange lights are just Volcanoes or Meteorites falling on Mars. Astronomers observe flashes of light on Mars once a day for ten days. The newspapers mention these strange lights, but no one can guess what they really mean. Instead, people just go about their ordinary lives. For instance, the narrator spends his time learning how to ride a bicycle.

Many people see a falling star one Thursday night. It was seen early in the morning rushing over Winchester eastward, a line of Flame high in the atmosphere. Ogilvy, an astronomer, friend of the narrator's, goes out to find the meteorite, which he thinks is somewhere on the common near Horsell. (What's a "common"? In this case, think of it as a public Park. Ogilvy finds the meteorite in a crater, which is where one usually finds meteorites. But this meteorite is a little strange: It's cylindrical and it makes some noise. Its outline softened by a thick scaly duncoloured incrustation. It has a diameter of about thirty yards. Then it starts to open,

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which is the really strange part.

Ingvald Raknem comments:

"... among the younger writers of the day Mr. Wells is the most distinctly original and the least indebted to predecessors. The whole conception of his romance was highly ingenious, its design most original, and the incidents in it were both ingenious and original."<sup>5</sup>

Ogilvy realizes that the cylinder is hollow and full of people. He thinks they are dying from the heat. In a somewhat heroic move, Ogilvy goes to help open the cylinder. Unfortunately, the cylinder is too hot to touch. But luckily the dull radiation arrested him before he could burn his hands on the still glowing metal. At that he stands irresolute for a moment then turns, scrambled out of the pit, and sets off running wildly into town working to get help, but he looks and sounds pretty batty, so he is ignored by a guy driving a wagon and almost gets locked inside a pub by someone else who thinks he is lunatic or crazy. Now Ogilvy tries to tell his neighbour, the London journalist, Henderson, about this amazing thing and Henderson actually listens to the guy (Probably because it would make a great newspaper article). This little meeting shows that Wells has a sense of humour, even if it is a British sense of humour. When Ogilvy tells Henderson that there is something inside the artificial cylinder, Henderson says, "What that?" We might expect him to say "What" because it is such amazing news, but actually he is saying "what" because he is partly deaf.

Ogilvy and Henderson rush to see the cylinder, but they still cannot help, so they run back to town. Now, instead of just one guy looking crazy and yelling about the meteorite, there are two guys looking crazy and yelling about the meteorite. The narrator asks us to imagine these two guys running into town while the townsfolk mostly go about their ordinary lives. Henderson goes into the railway station at once, in order to telegraph the news to London. Some locals go to see the "dead men from Mars", which is what people are saying this cylinder is. The narrator hears about this story from his newspaper boy about a quarter to nine when he goes out to get his Daily chronicle and rushes off to see for himself.

The narrator goes to see the cylinder in the morning and finds a small crowd of people: Some boys throwing stones at the cylinder, some cyclists, a jobbing gardener, a girl carrying a baby, Gregg the butcher and his little boy, and two or three loafers and golf caddies who are accustomed to hang about the railway station. In other words, just ordinary folk who have come to see the spectacle.

However the narrator gets close to it that the strangeness of this object is at all evident to him. At the first glance it was really no more exciting than "an overturned carriage or a tree blown across the road."<sup>6</sup> It looks like a rusty gas-float. It requires a certain amount of scientific education to perceive that the grey scale of the thing is no common oxide, that the yellowish white metal that gleams in the crack between the lid and the cylinder has an unfamiliar hue.

Luckily, the narrator is not really bored—unlike the other onlookers, he knows what the word, "extraterrestrial" means. He imagines that the cylinder might contain some message from the Planet Mars and judges it improbable that it contains a living creature and is impatient to see inside it.

Ingvald Raknem comments—

"In bringing his Martians to the earth, it was believed, Wells had imitated Du Maurier and Marie Corelli as close students of Camille Flammarion."<sup>7</sup>

The narrator goes home, since nothing is happening, but returns in the afternoon. By that time, the newspaper has spread the news: "A MESSAGE RECEIVED FROM MARS."

"REMARKABLE STORY FROM WOKING"<sup>8</sup>

There is a larger crowd looking at the cylinder, including Ogilvy, Henderson, and Stent, the Astronomer Royal, with several workmen wielding spades and pick axes. Stent is directing some workmen in uncovering the cylinder. Curiously, Stent is the one who is streaming with perspiration which just goes to show: It's hard work telling other people what to do. Ogilvy asks the narrator to go speak to Lord Hilton about getting a light railing

around the crater. The narrator is very glad to do as he asked and so become one of the privileged spectators within the contemplated enclosure. He fails to find Lord Hilton at his house but he is told he is expected from London by the Six O' clock train from Waterloo; and as it is then about a quarter past five. The narrator returns to Horsell Common to discover an even larger crowd, all pushing to be able to see the cylinder. All, that is, except for one poor guy who fell into the crater and is trying to push his way back out.

Then the cylinder opens and out comes something that no one expects. The narrator admits that he expected something sort of like a man to emerge, but instead what comes out is snake-like tentacles and a body about the size of a bear and skin that glistens like wet leather. Every one runs away from the Martian just because it looks horrible, what with its Saliva-dripping, lipless mouth and big, luminous eyes.

Ingvald Raknem comments here again—

"In treating celestial bodies in his fiction, he was said to carry on the tradition of Cyrano de Bergerac, Fontenelle, Pol and Verne."<sup>8</sup>

Since all of the people have found cover (they've found places to hide and watch), the area by the Crater is now a human Free Zone, with just some horses and carts. Now, remember the man who fell in the crater before? He's still down there.

After the glimpse the narrator had had of the Martians emerging from the cylinder in which they had come to the earth from their Planet, a kind of Fascination Paralyzed his actions. He remains standing knee-deep in the heather staring at the mound that hid them. The narrator keeps flitting between fear and curiosity— he is "a battleground" between these two feelings— But eventually, his curiosity wins and he goes to find a better view of the Pit. Although it's getting dark now which is not the best time of day to examine Martians. Many of the other people are also bucking up and returning to the pit. Some of these people (Fools?) walk really close to the cylinder, waving a white flag to signal their peaceful intentions. Later, the narrator learns that Ogilvy, Henderson and Stent were with others in this attempt at communication.

There is a Flash of light in the Pit and some bright green smoke comes out of the pit in three distinct Puffs, which drove up, one after the other, straight into the still air. This smoke (or flame, perhaps, would be the better word for it) is so bright that the deep blue sky overhead and the hazy stretches of brown common towards Chertsey, set with black pine-trees, seemed to darken abruptly as these puffs arose and to remain the darker after their dispersal. At the same time a faint hissing sound became audible. Beyond the Pit stand the little wedge of people with the white flag at its apex, arrested by these phenomena. As the green smoke arises, their faces flash out pallid green and fade again as it vanished. Then slowly the hissing passes into a humming, into a long, loud, droning noise. Slowly a humped shape rises out of the pit and the ghost of a beam of light seems to flicker out from it. As the people get closer to the pit, a dome-like object rises out of the pit and....

Nowadays, we have lasers and Flame throwers, so this might not sound so amazing to us, but imagine reading this in 1898: "It was as if some invisible jet impinged upon them and flashed into white flame. It was as if each man were suddenly and momentarily turned to fire."<sup>9</sup>

The narrator is so shocked by this that he doesn't realize that people are dying. "All I felt was that it was something very strange."<sup>10</sup> He is so shocked that he doesn't move and would've died, but the Heat-Ray happens to miss him. Eventually he realizes his situation aliens are shooting a Heat-Ray at him- so he decides skedaddle. He runs, weeping silently like a child.

St. Loe Strachey comments here:

"Mr. Wells's story it is in no sort of sense a 'Fake'. He has not written haphazard, but has imagined, and then followed his imagination with the utmost niceness and sincerity. To this niceness and sincerity Mr. Wells adds an ingenuity and inventiveness in the matter of detail which is beyond praise."<sup>11</sup>

Wells's description of chemical weapons— The Black smoke used by the Martian Fighting machines to murder human beings in great numbers— was later a reality during the First World War, with the use of Mustard Gas. The Heat-Ray, used by the Martians to annihilate nineteenth century military technology, and cause

widespread devastation, is a precursor to the concept of laser weaponry, now widely familiar. Comparison between lasers and the Heat-Ray was made as early as the later half of the 1950s when lasers were still in development. The frequency at which the "Martian Heat-Ray" might have operated is obviously unstated, as at the time such "rays" were pure Fantasy as the technology and scientific know how required to produce lasers of any kind had not even been envisioned other than as a "Fantasy". Prototypes of mobile laser weapons have been developed and it is now being researched and tested as a possible future weapon in space.

No one knows how the Martian Heat-Ray works (besides the fact that it manages to scorch people), but the narrator is willing to give us some theories anyway. People from the neighbouring towns come to see what all the fuss is about. As the narrator notes, young people use this news as an excuse to go out and flirt, just as they would use any news to go out and flirt. Police try to keep the crowd back, but there are only three police and may be 300 people in the crowd, so our money is on the crowd. Earlier Stent and Ogilvy had telegraphed a nearby military barracks to ask for some soldiers to come out and protect the Martian from the crowd, but the army hasn't shown up yet. This is what folks in the lit biz call irony. The Heat-Ray kills some people, but it misses others. The crowd stampedes like a Flock of sheep, and they end up trampling two women and a little boy. Interestingly, this is much more specific than the info the narrator gives us about who got killed by the Heat-Ray.

Linda R. Anderson comments–

"His work dealt almost always with actual possibilities of invention and discovery, and he made some remarkable, forecasts.... But these stories of mine collected here do not pretend to deal with possible things, they are exercises of the imagination in a quite different field."<sup>12</sup>

The narrator runs away in terror until he can't run anymore. He remembers nothing of his flight except the stress of blundering against trees and stumbling through the heather. All about him gathered the invisible terrors of the Martians; that pitiless sword of heat seemed whirling to and fro, flourishing overhead before it descended and smote me out of life. He comes into the road between the cross-roads and Horsell, and runs along this to the cross-roads. After a rest, he also finds that he is not terrified anymore– "My terror had fallen from me like a garment."<sup>13</sup> And so did his hat- it fell off him just like a garment, probably because it is one) what happened on the Horsell common now seems like a dream to him.

He wanders home, noticing some ordinary things, like a train. He stops to chat with a group of people who don't see what all the fuss is about, which annoys him. The narrator annoys because people are not taking the Martians seriously enough. The narrator himself points out that he is a man "of exceptional moods".

The narrator arrives home and he startles his wife at the doorway, so haggard is he. He goes into the dining room, sits down, drinks some wine and tells his wife about the Martians. She becomes very nervous but her reaction would make the narrator happy, since that's kind of what he wanted from the group of people he talked to on the way home. Now all he wants to do is assure her that they are safe. To do so, the narrator points out that the Martians are weak and can't get out of the pit because Earth has a higher gravity than Mars.

Looking back on the invasion, the narrator tells us that he missed a few obvious points: 1- Earth air has more oxygen, which is invigorating and 2-the Martians are mechanical geniuses and can build machines to do the lifting for them. But the narrator doesn't realize these things at the moment and enjoys his dinner, secure in the thought that the humans can kill the Martians whenever they want. He then compares himself to a dodo bird: "So some respectable dodo in the Mauritius might have lorded it in his nest, and discussed the arrival of that shipful of pitiless sailors in want to animal food. We will peck them to death tomorrow, my dear."<sup>14</sup> Ingvald Raknem comments–

"The idea of a war between two worlds, it is true, was not conceived by the author himself but by his brother Frank: We were walking together through some particular peaceful Surrey scenery. 'Suppose some beings from another planet were to drop out of the sky suddenly', said he 'and began laying about them here!'... That was the point of departure..."<sup>15</sup>

Except for the Martians using a Heat-Ray to kill a lot of people, things are pretty ordinary that Friday night around the rest of England. The news that a cylinder from Mars has landed on Earth doesn't get much attention and certainly isn't treated seriously. For instance, Henderson wired his newspaper to tell this story, but they thought it was a hoax and didn't want to run the article until they could confirm it with him. But they couldn't confirm it with him because the Martians burned him. Even people who know about the cylinder are not taking it too seriously. Some people try to sneak up and get a look at the Martians but they are never seen again. There is also some construction going on in the pit, but that's probably nothing to worry about. Though no one else seems to care, the military does take this threat somewhat seriously and comes out in full force. A second cylinder falls nearby, but again, no one is too worried.

Saturday morning is "a most unexceptional morning". The narrator talk to the milkman and his neighbour and everyone is sure the military has all this under control. Everything seems very ordinary, especially with the little touches that wells adds, like the neighbour giving the narrator some strawberries from his garden and tells the narrator of the burning of the pine-woods about the By fleet Golf links. The narrator ends up chatting with a bunch of sappers (Soldier engineers) who generally agree with the neighbour and the milkman– they've got the situation under control. The sappers all have different theories about how to kill the Martians. The narrator tries to get more info on the situation, but the newspapers only have old news (and not entirely accurate news at that). The military prepares to confront the Martians, and the narrator's schoolboy dreams of heroic war are awoken by all this: My imagination became belligerent, and defeated the invaders in a dozen striking ways."<sup>16</sup> Then, while the narrator is having tea with his wife, some nearby towers catch on fire and the narrator's chimney is destroyed by the Heat-Ray. The narrator quickly decides that, rather than heroically defeat the Martians, he should rest get out of town.

Basil Williams comments–

"Mr. Wells has evidently studied and attempted to imitate the methods of Jules Verne in this account of an attack from Mars on the earth."<sup>17</sup>

The narrator decides to go to Leatherhead, where he has family. The narrator runs over to the spotted Dog in order to hire the landlord's horse and cart. There is some miscommunication at the spotted dog, but the narrator successfully hires the cart and loads up his wife and servant and some of their possessions. A passing soldier says something about the Martians "Crawling out in a thing like a dish cover."<sup>18</sup> And then the narrator is off. Apparently, he doesn't like dish covers.

The Martian invasion proceeds with total disregard for human life; attacks on people and their environment are conducted with the heat-ray, with poisonous gas, the Black Smoke, delivered by rockets and the Red weed. These weapons brought almost total destruction to the capital of the British Empire and its surrounding countries. It also involves the strategic destruction of infrastructure such as armament stores, railways and telegraph lines. It appears to be intended to cause maximum casualties, terrorising and leaving humans without any will to resist. These tactics became more common as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, particularly from the 1930s with the development of mobile weapons and technology capable of surgical strikes on key military and civilian targets.

The narrator drives to Leatherhead where his family lives and leaves his wife there. Leatherhead is about twelve miles from Maybury Hill. Though he should've stayed in Leatherhead that night, he has to go back to woking to return the horse and cart he rented. Also, he confesses to having some "War-Fever"– he wants to be there to see the Martians defeated. It was nearly eleven when he starts to return. The night was unexpectedly dark to him. Things were so much easier in the beginning of the book, when he could be sure that dark houses at night meant people were sleeping. Then the third cylinder arrives. But that's not all. The narrator sees one of the Martian tripods, which he describes as moving like a "milking stool tilted and bowled violently along the ground."<sup>19</sup> Then, as if one tripod wasn't enough, another monstrous tripod appears in front of the narrator. He crashes the cart and the horses dies–so, we guess he won't be returning it to the landlord.

The narrator ends up watching the tripods pass over him, making some strange "Aloo! aloo!" sound. After

the Martian tripods pass, the narrator basically crawls most of the way home in the terrible storm. It's such a bad storm that he doesn't see the landlord's dead body until he stumbles upon it- so we guess he really won't be returning the (dead) horse and cart to him. (But at least he doesn't have to come up with some excuse to the landlord). The narrator lets himself into his house and spends some time shivering.

R.A. Gregory comments–

"Many writers of fiction have gathered material from the fairy-land of science, and have used it in the construction of literary fabrics, but none have done it more successfully than Mr. H.G. Wells."<sup>20</sup>

The Martians travel to the Earth in cylinder, apparently fired from a huge space gun on the surface of Mars. This was a common representation of space travel in the nineteenth century and had also been used by Jules Verne in from the Earth to the Moon. Modern scientific understanding renders this idea impractical, as it would be difficult to control the trajectory of the gun precisely and the force of the explosion necessary to propel the cylinder from the Martian surface to the Earth would likely kill the occupants.

However, the 16 year old *Robert H. Goddard* was inspired by the story and spent much of his life inventing rockets. The research into rockets begun by Goddard eventually culminated in the *Apollo Program's* manned landing on the moon.

After changing his clothes, the narrator goes upstairs and looks out his study window. The storm is over, but since it's night, all he sees is darkness and fire. His secure "little world" has been turned into a "Fiery Chaos". He thinks about the tripods–are they alive or are they machines? He comes up with the neat analogy: what would some animal think about our ironclads or steam engines? Before the narrator makes too many connections between the Martians and humans, a soldier interrupts by climbing into his garden. The narrator invites him in and they talk. The soldier cries while he tells his story and our narrator listens "With a curious forgetfulness of his own recent despair."<sup>21</sup>

The soldier reveals that he's an artilleryman who was saved by dumb luck when the rest of his unit was wiped out: the horse he was riding stumbled and tossed him into a ditch just when all the ammunition blew up around his unit without a hint of humour, the artilleryman tells the narrator that it smelled just like "burnt meat", which makes sense because, well, what he smelled was burnt meat. The artilleryman was trapped under a horse while the tripod destroyed the area. After it left, he crawled away, and eventually ended up in the narrator's garden, when the artilleryman finishes with his story, it's daytime and they can see the destruction of the area: "Never before in the history of warfare had destruction been so indiscriminate and so universal."<sup>22</sup>

Ingvald Raknem comments here–

"The war machines of the Martians may not be of Wells's invention; for their Frightful Heat-Ray reminds one very strongly of Bulwer Lytton's Vril, which was an equally destructive instrument. Wells may also have heard of John Hartman's electric gun, the story of which was told in the London newspapers in the nineties. This gun discharged rays of electricity and was said to strike dead whatever came within its range, just as the Martians' Heat-Rays did."<sup>23</sup>

The artilleryman plans to meet up with his military battery (unit) in London– No.12, of the Horse Artillery in order to continue the fight, while the narrator plans to meet up with his wife in Leatherhead in order to get the check out of the country. They take some food and, to avoid the third cylinder, they take the long route. Luckily for us, the long route passes through a lot of destruction, so we get to hear about charred bodies and abandoned possession. We suppose this is Wells's way of reminding us that there is a war going on.

On their way, the narrator and artilleryman run into three cavalrymen and they share some information about the Martians. Also the narrator notices that one of them has a heliograph that looks like a theodolite– which are both great words to say aloud. If one must know what those words mean, a *theodolite* is a device used in surveying and measuring, while a *heliograph* is a device that uses a mirror to send light signals. One of the cavalrymen tells them to go weybridge, where the brigadier-general is. As the narrator and the artillery man, travel farther from the front, the world seems more peaceful and ordinary- except there are other artillery men,

setting up their guns, so it's not totally ordinary. Still, if we must have something out of the ordinary, we'll take "artillery being set up" over "Charred bodies" any day: both are a little out of the ordinary, but one involves fewer charred bodies, when the narrator and the artilleryman reach weybridge they see the military trying to evacuate people. One old man doesn't want to leave without his valuable orchids, so the narrator gently tells him, "Death!... death is coming! Death!"<sup>24</sup> The old man doesn't quite get the message. The narrator and the artilleryman hang around weybridge, which is not Panic-stricken. They seem to calm down. For instance, they find the time to help some old women pack. The people in weybridge are evacuating, but not panicked about it. Why? Because they think of the Martians as "Simply formidable human beings, who might attack and sack the town" but would "be certainly destroyed in the end."<sup>25</sup>

Then the army's guns start firing— and then stop firing when the Martians have destroyed them. The Martian tripods become visible and the Martians continue to do what they do best: destroy stuff. To escape the "Terrible Heat-Ray", the narrator decides to get into the River Thames, which seems like a good idea, except that the Heat-Ray causes the water to heat up. The Thames gets especially hot when one of the Martian tripods falls into the river after some artillery kills the Martian driving it. Rather than get out of the boiling water, the narrator wants to go check out the Martian wreck. The narrator eventually crawls out of the boiling water and falls down on the riverbank. From that position, he sees the remaining tripods take away the wreckage of the fallen tripod.

Ingvald Raknem comments here his acknowledgement—

"Wells may have studied Lowell. We know he did so later; for in an article of 1908, 'The Things That Live on Mars', he acknowledged his indebtedness to Lowell's Mars and its Canals, which appeared in 1906."<sup>26</sup>

Rather than invade London, the Martians retreat to Horsell common after one of them dies. This means that the British army has time to dig in and prepare their defenses. Instead of advancing on London, the Martians are hard at work on something. Meanwhile, the narrator finds a small boat and drifts down towards London. He rests for a while on shore and then, out of the blue, becomes angry with his wife. As he says, "It is a curious thing that I felt angry with my wife; I cannot account for it, but my impotent desire to reach Leatherhead worried me excessively."<sup>27</sup>

When he wakes up from resting, he discovers a new friend: the curate (meaning, a Parish Priest or an assistant Priest). The curate wants to know what it all means. Why do bad Martians happen to good English-People? The narrator tries to get him thinking about practical issues, but the curate decides that the Martians are a Biblical-sized judgement: This must be the beginning of the end... The end! The great and terrible day of the Lord!"<sup>28</sup> The narrator responds with both a theological argument and a practical argument. Theological: "God is not an insurance agent..."<sup>29</sup> Practical: We're in the middle of a battlefield and should probably get a move on. We're convinced by both arguments, though we're not sure which one would convince the curate.

The Chapter (In London) of the novel leaves the narrator and follows his younger brother in London, where the brother is a medical student, working for an imminent examination. Londoners get news of the Martians, though some of it is garbled. For instance, the Heat-Ray becomes a "quick-firing gun". Most of the Londoners are sure they are safe and so there isn't much worry over some distressing, clues— like the telegraph system to the working area failing or the trains not going to working on time on Saturday. The narrator notes that he's read accounts in which London got all excited on Sunday with the news of the Martians. The telegram concluded with the words: "Formidable as they seem to be, the Martians have not moved from the pit into which they have fallen, and indeed, seem incapable of doing so. Probably this is due to the relative strength of the earth's gravitational energy."<sup>30</sup> But from what he's been able find out, people generally went about their ordinary lives. By contrast, the narrator's brother wants to make a change from his ordinary life— he wants to move toward the invasion.

However, as the day goes on, the alien invasion starts to affect people's lives. For example, people cannot go out into the country for picnics, which probably ruins their days, but at least they are not turned into charred corpses. Also, refugees flood into the city and the army moves out. (Neither the refugees nor the soldiers really blend in with people going around in their Sunday best). In order to get some info about the Martians, the



narrator's brother buys an expensive newspaper— instead of the usual price of probably a penny, it costs three pennies. Although this newspaper describes the terrible Martian weapons, the news paper's tone is "Optimistic", possibly because of how inflated the Price is. In London, one can hear the big guns firing at the Martians— at least, if one is in a small side alley one can. Otherwise the streets are so crowded and loud that one really can't hear much of anything but city clamor. Although he's worried about the narrator, the narrator's brother goes to sleep on Sunday night, only to wake up early on Monday to an alarm going off. Apparently the Martians are coming and everyone else is politely— but quickly—leaving London to make room. "London, which had gone to bed on Sunday night oblivious and inert, was awakened in the small hours of Monday morning to a vivid sense of danger."<sup>31</sup> People are yelling about Black smoke. Meanwhile, a newspaperman is running away from the city, selling his papers for a lot more than usual— "a grotesque mingling of profit and Panic."<sup>32</sup> From the paper, the brother learns that the Black smoke is a type of poison gas. (This was before chemical warfare became a common part of war, so for people reading this book in 1898, this is something very new and terrible.) Also, there is a government announcement that everyone should get out of London. The brother grabs his money and gets out. Hopefully he'll have enough moolah for another paper or two.

St. Loe Strachey comments—

"In Mr. Wells's romance two things have been done with Marvellous Power. The first is the imagining of the Martians, their descent upon the earth and their final overthrow. They were terribly difficult figures to bring on and keep on the stage, but the difficulty of managing their exit with a reasonable difference to the decencies of fictional probability was nothing but colossal. Yet Mr. Wells turns this difficulty triumphantly. The second thing which Mr. Wells has done with notable success is his description of the moral effects produced on a great city by the attack of a ruthless enemy. His account of the stampede from London along the great North Road is full of imaginative force."<sup>33</sup>

After regrouping on Horsell common to working on something, the Martian tripods go on the offensive. Some artillery units try to stop the Martians, but things don't go so well for the humans. The narrator gives two examples to demonstrate this: One artillery unit is made up of inexperienced soldiers who panic and runaway, while another unit damages (but doesn't destroy) a tripod and then gets blown up by the Martian Heat-Ray. The narrator wonders if the Martians want to exterminate people. Then leaves us with the parenthetical remark that "At that time no one knew what food they needed"<sup>34</sup>.

The Martians begin to launch their rockets. The narrator hides with the curate under a bush, but he sneaks out to see what these rockets are. He expects some explosion, but all he sees is some dark cloud. Since the events in this story, the narrator has learned all about the Black Smoke, which is a heavy gas that kills anyone who breathes it. It disperses after a few days (it sinks to the ground and forms a powder coating to the world), unless the Martians get rid of it quicker by spraying steam to clear the air. In fact, The Black Smoke is so heavy that people who go up high in building just might survive. The narrator and the curate take refuge in an abandoned house in Halliford, waiting out the Black Smoke. Also, there is a fourth cylinder in Bushey Park. The Martians advance, using the Black Smoke to kill the army when the guns are hidden, and using their Heat-Ray when the humans' guns are visible.

In the face of that danger, the military basically falls apart. Even sailors meeting and take their ships out to sea. (This is big news considering what role the navy has played in keeping Britain safe—think of the English navy beating back the Spanish Armada in 1588 or keeping off Napoleon during the Napoleonic wars.) The narrator then asks us to imagine what it would feel like to be in one of the those artillery units, waiting until one could stop the Martians, but instead being dosed by poison gas. It's not really fun to imagine at all. It's kind of a bummer. Lastly, the narrator notes that the government, before it disintegrated totally, tried to evacuate London. Which is a nice segue into.... (Chapter 16): The Exodus from London.

Linda R. Anderson comments—

"Wells was increasingly committed to a path of gradual withdrawal from Fiction into a kind of writing which was more directly sociological or prophetic, where the acts of the imagination were also conceived

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as attempts to transform society."<sup>35</sup>

We are back to London and the story of the narrator's brother. First, we start with some broader overviews of how London is falling apart: "By ten O'clock the Police organisation, and by midday even the railway organisations, were losing coherency, losing shape and efficiency, guttering, softening, running at last in that swift liquefaction of the social body."<sup>36</sup> That's a pretty gruesome, but kind of awesome description of society falling apart–

Since the trains aren't running regularly anymore, the narrator's brother gets a bicycle on a very good discount for free. In other words, a crowd robs a bike store and the brother is lucky enough to be one of the mob who gets a bike (with a punctured tire). He rides out of the city, but the bike breaks down eventually, so he decides to walk to some friends' place farther away from the city. On his way, the brother runs into an attempted robbery. Three men are attacking two women in a Pony-drawn carriage. (It may be that the three men are refugees who just want the carriage. Or they might just be ordinary robbers. It's unclear.)

The brother knocks out one of the robbers, and the women get away, so the brother is a hero. Unfortunately, he's a hero facing two very angry guys all by himself–until one of the women comes back for him and she's got a gun. She nearly shoots the brother by accident, but the shot does scare off the robbers. The brother and the two women decide to travel on together.

In Defoe's book considerable space is given to the description of the adventures of three men– armed with a gun who were trying to get away from London.

Ingvald Raknem comments here regarding this episode mentioned in the story of the novel–

"Wells also describes a dramatic episode in which three men are trying to get out of the city by depriving two ladies of their carriage. Their plan is baffled by one of the ladies– Who is armed with a gun."<sup>37</sup> Wells and Defoe could hardly have described by mere coincidence such an episode. Consciously or unconsciously, Wells must have copied Defoe.

The women are Mrs. Elphinstone (married to a doctor who is off helping people) and the doctor's sister, Miss Elphinstone. Miss Elphinstone is the one who came back to save the brother from the robbers. By contrast, Mrs. Elphinstone mostly just gets nervous and calls for her husband. To make them feel better, the brother says that he knows all about how to use a gun, though he's lying. They see tons people evacuating on a crowded street. Everyone is different from each other except that they're all afraid. While the crowd is largely indistinct, there are three men who particularly stand out: (1) A blind man wearing a salvation Army uniform and preaching about the end of the world. Well, yelling "Eternity! Eternity!" which is pretty much the same thing. (2) Lord Garrick, the Chief Justice, who was in a carriage in the midst of the throng, but is taken out because he's dying. The Lord Chief Justice is the second-highest judge of all England (and Wales), but that doesn't save him from dying in terrible circumstances. (3) A guy with a bag full of money who is clearly attached to that money. When the bag breaks, he tries to get his money and is almost trampled to death. (However, when the narrator's brother tries to drag the man to safety, the man has enough energy to bite the hand that's trying to help him.) The narrator's brother realizes they have to get into this mass, so with young Miss Elphinstone's help, they force their way in. Eventually they come out on the other side and find a place where they can rest. That evening, while they rest, some people come by going the opposite direction as them, fleeing from some terror. The brother's group seems to have jumped out of one terrible situation only to go toward another.

Wells's great skill in *The War of the World* lies in the convincing way he is able to describe startling and novel events happening to perfectly ordinary people. The description of *The Exodus From London*, for example, is an extraordinary vivid imaginative account of mass hysteria and Panic produced by fear of the unknown– and a remarkable anticipation of scenes of crowd behaviour in cities such as Petrograd and Moscow during the Russian Revolution. Wells was one of the earliest writers to describe mass panic in the face of universal disaster: a theme which has become almost a stock-in-trade of twentieth-century science fiction.

This chapter starts with an interesting image: the narrator asks us to imagine a bird's-eye view (From up

in a balloon) of the Chaos. Instead of individuals, one would see a "Swarming of black dots", the biggest mass of people ever in history. More than that, if one were in a balloon and the world was spread out like a map below one, one would see parts of it "blotted" from the destruction of the Martians. The Martians seem interested in destroying the British capacity to fight back, which is why they focus on telegraph wires, trains, and army positions. These guys learn quickly. On Monday, the dock area of London is very busy—boat captains are charging a fortune to take people away (and people who can't pay are often drowned). The narrator promises to tell us about the Fifth cylinder later, but he does tell us that the sixth cylinder lands at Wimbledon.

As the brother and his group travel toward the sea on Tuesday, they hear rumours about what's going on and how there is free food somewhere. But the information is uncertain, so they decide to push on to the sea. They also see another cylinder fall—the seventh—on Tuesday night. A Chelmsford on Wednesday, a group calling themselves the Committee of Public Supply Commander the brother's Pony, so the brother's group continues to the sea on foot. By midday Wednesday, they can see the sea. There they finds a strange collection of ships, all taking passengers for money. The brother buys passage on one of the ships going to Ostend (in Belgium). They also see a navy ship called the Thunder Child. The thunder child is an ironclad ram. Mrs. Elphinstone is worried about leaving the country. The narrator's brother notes that, "She seemed, poor woman, to imagine that the French and the Martians might prove very similar."<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, some Martian tripods show up, which happens around the same time their ship sets off. The tripods move toward the passenger ships, even wading deep into the water. These are the first Martians that the brother has seen, and he is "mere amazed than terrified". The tripods come on to destroy (or capture?) the ships, but just then the Thunder Child rams and destroys two of the tripods, allowing the passenger ships to escape. The narrator wonders if may be the Thunder Child was able to get close to the tripods because they thought it was "even such another as themselves". As the steamer is heading off to safety, the narrator's brother notices something flying over England. This unidentified flying object "rained down darkness upon the land", which is the happy image this volume ends on.

## CONCLUSION

The novel is the first-person narrative of an unnamed Protagonist's adventures in London and the countryside southwest of London as Earth is invaded by Martians. It is one of the earliest stories that details a conflict between mankind and an extraterrestrial race. The novel has been variously interpreted as a commentary on evolutionary theory, British imperialism, and generally Victorian Superstitions, Fear and Prejudices.

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