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# *The War of the Worlds*

by

**H. G. Wells**

**1898**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Kelly McCauley

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

Most of the story takes place in the small towns found in the countryside of England. The narrator's home is in Woking, and the first few chapters mostly take place here. He then takes his wife to Leatherhead to save her from the Martians. In his own attempts to escape them, he makes his way through a number of towns including Weybridge and Shepperton (the scene of a Martian attack), Sheen (where the fifth cylinder landed, burying the house with the narrator and curate), and Putney Hill (the location of the artilleryman). London is also an important place in the book. The story of the narrator's brother tells.....

### CHARACTER LIST

#### Major Characters

**Narrator** - A philosopher by occupation, his writing is interrupted by the arrival of the Martians, of which he is one of the first to know. He survives a number of close calls but lives past the end of the invasion. With the exception of a few days insanity after finding the dead Martians, the narrator is a character with a strong grip on reality, though his reality becomes one he never.....

**Martians** - A species that has developed great mental, and along with it, technical abilities in order to escape their planet, which is rapidly becoming uninhabitable. Physically, they resemble an octopus, with their many tentacles and a head that stands without a body, and they feed by injecting the blood from a live organism into themselves. They show no signs of mercy when they arrive on Earth, their .....

**Artilleryman** - After escaping a Martian's Heat-Ray as a result of his horse tripping, he wanders into the garden of the narrator, who takes him in. When they set off the next day, the artilleryman demonstrates a great sense of logic and caution, insisting on taking provisions and taking care to avoid.....

**Curate** - The representative of religion, who is not shown in a very positive light. He becomes extremely distraught and senseless after seeing the destruction of his church and all of Weybridge. He is unwilling to part with the narrator, though their two personalities are completely incompatible. When.....

**Brother** - A medical student whose tale is related by the narrator in order to show what went on in London. After fleeing London among the crowds in the early morning hours, he meets up with the.....

#### Minor Characters

**Wife** - She affects the plot more through providing a direction and motivation to the narrator's actions rather than through her own actions. She is concerned from the narrator's first recounting of the Martians about the dinner table and is still pale with concern when she and the narrator part in.....

**Ogilvy** - the astronomer who is one of the few to take an interest in the Martians from the start. He sets off to find the fallen star (which was actually the first cylinder, but he is slow to accept this), and.....

### CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - The main character, and usually someone the reader is able to sympathize with, is the protagonist of the story. In *The War of the Worlds*, this figure is the unnamed narrator. He is a man with the simple aims of trying to find his wife and survive amidst an environment that has changed remarkably. The narrator has done nothing to bring this about- he was working in his study when.....

**Antagonists** - There are several antagonists, those who stand in the narrator's way, the primary one being the Martians. They come close to killing the narrator a number of times and their destruction takes a heavy toll on him, from seeing the dead bodies in the streets to being driven to knocking the curate out.

The curate himself could also be seen as an antagonist. Though he starts off as a fairly ineffectual character that merely follows the narrator about, soon his conflicting personality comes out and.....

**Climax** - The climax, the event that all the others have been leading up to, comes on Primrose Hill. At that point, the narrator has seemingly lost all concern for his own life and is ready to.....

**Outcome** - The end result of the story, the outcome, is that the world begins to return to normal. The Martians and the red weed have been killed off by disease. People begin to return to their homes and resume their lives. The narrator is reunited with his wife. But the world view has become one of .....

## **SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)**

Mars is a planet older than Earth and has entered the cooling-off stage. The drop in temperature and sea level drives its inhabitants to devise a method of getting off the planet. They fire themselves off in canisters towards Earth.

The astronomer Ogilvy sees this and becomes excited, and gradually the rest of Britain takes an interest in Mars. Articles are run in the papers and people begin watching the flame, which appears when the canisters are shot into space around midnight for ten nights altogether. However, no one has any idea what is about to happen and life continues on. The narrator for example, learns to ride a bicycle.

It lands and Ogilvy sets off to find the fallen meteorite (which is what he believes it to be). When he thinks there is a man inside it, he hurries off to tell someone, finally convincing the journalist Henderson.

The news spreads and soon there is a crowd about the pit that the landing caused. A young shop assistant is knocked in by the crowd of people pushing for better positions. The cylinder's top unscrews and the Martians emerge. They are a bit larger than humans and have many tentacles. They lack bodies but have heads with big eyes. At the sight of them, the frightened crowd runs off to shelter behind trees. The shopkeeper's figure stands out against the setting sun, struggling to get out and then it disappears into the pit.

The crowd remains stunned but eventually curiosity gets the better of them and people begin to move closer. The Deputation advances, until, after a flash of light and three puffs of green smoke, a machine rises and sends out a laser-like beam, sending 40 people up in flames. Then the machine goes back down into the pit.

The narrator takes off running, terrified, until he collapses near a bridge. When he has regained control, he makes his way back home and tells his wife of the Martians over dinner. When he realizes he has scared her, he quickly explains that they cannot possibly be much of threat since the Earth's stronger gravity will make them slow.

Only those in the immediate area of the pit are concerned at this point and everyday activities continue. The Martians are busily at work in the pit and every so often the Heat-Ray emerges and kills those that have ventured too close. The military starts to become involved, realizing the danger of the situation.

After a restless night during which the second cylinder lands, the narrator tries to get some news about the Martians but is unable to, as the military has control of the church towers and does not tell him anything. As they begin to ask people to leave the area, the narrator gets a dog cart from the landlord of the Spotted Dog, who is unaware of the situation. The narrator gets his wife and the two head to Leatherhead, where she has cousins.

Shortly after their arrival, the narrator heads back out, reminding his wife that he promised to return the cart but really because he finds it exciting. By the time he returns, a severe storm is raging that sends the horse bolting down a hill. The cart overturns, landing the narrator in a puddle. Through the lightning, he.....

## THEMES

The major theme is one of **the possible submission of men**. The most obvious form is that of being at the mercy of the Martians, as they chase men from their homes and capture them to use for injection. However, some of the other characters have given in to forces other than the Martians. The curate has become a victim of himself and his religion. The artilleryman turns to a life of drinking and playing.....

The minor theme of **the inhumanity of imperialism** is mentioned from the first chapter. Throughout, Wells makes subtle remarks about other social problems, particularly the plight of the working-class. Another minor theme is the horrors of war, a lesson that emphasized by telling that study of.....

## MOOD

The stated intention of the novel is to set out an exacting narration of the events concerning the Martian invasion. This has led to a pervading mood of solemnity and intensity, as the narrator sees his.....

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

H.G. (Herbert George) Wells was born in Bromley, England on September 21, 1866. His family was not well off- his father worked as a shopkeeper and cricket player and his mother was a housekeeper. Wells was the couple's fourth and last son. At age eight a broken leg accelerated his interest in reading.

When his father was no longer able to make enough to support the family, Wells became a draper's assistant at age 13. However, he was able to attend the Normal School of Science on a scholarship, where he met Thomas Huxley. Wells went on to teach biology until 1893.

"The Time Machine" was published in 1895 and quickly became a favorite among readers. This was the first of a series of yearly successes that included "The Island of Dr. Moreau," "The Invisible Man," and "The War of the Worlds." This early writing cemented his reputation as the father of .....

## LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Many of the minor themes in this book relate to Wells' own time. The Victorian Age in Britain lasted for most of the 1800s through the early 1900s. It was a period of great empire and .....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

### Book One: The Coming of the Martians

#### Chapter One (The Eve of the War)

##### Summary

The book begins with "[n]o 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." People are going about their lives on Earth, with little concern for extraterrestrial life beyond pondering its possibility. But this will soon change.

Mars, being older than Earth, is therefore further along in the evolutionary process. The planet is now in its final stage, that of cooling off. For the inhabitants that have lived there since before human development on Earth began, the problems posed by cooler temperatures and smaller oceans has led them to develop great intellectual powers, in order to meet the needs of the moment. When they turn their newly created instruments towards Earth, 35,000,000 miles away, they see a way to survive.

By 1894, the Martians have developed space travel, which from Earth's perspective, appears as if "a colossal puff of flame suddenly and violently squirted out of the planet, 'as flaming gases rushed out of a gun.'" The

event causes little stir on Earth at first, but the narrator meets Ogilvy, an astronomer who is quite interested in it, and agrees to join him at the observatory that night.

Again, around midnight, there is a shot, and this continues for a total of 10 consecutive nights. Then it stops; speculation is that it could possibly be that the gases caused by the shots were disrupting the Martian atmosphere, thereby forcing them to stop the launchings.

People then took note, but continued about as they had always done; the narrator, for example, was learning to ride a bicycle. He went for a starlit walk with his wife one night, and took comfort in “the brightness of the red, green, and yellow signal lights hanging in a framework against the sky.” And every day the “Things” from Mars were quickly approaching Earth.

## Notes

If the title wasn't enough, the opening chapter certainly indicates an approaching war. The idea of Mars as the “star of war” throughout history and the likening of the launchings to the firing of a gun both bring out the idea of an invasion from Mars.

“[T]he minute gleam” that was seen when the Things were launched is in sharp comparison to the narrator's wish for “a light to smoke by” during his time at the observatory and is telling of human nature. Here is a light, full of significance as it foretells the coming of the Martians, yet the narrator, and everyone else, misses the meaning and focuses on the trivial light at hand.

This, along with the details of riding a bike and the signal lights, show the tendency to focus on the little things and miss the bigger picture of what's going on. Also, they show the frailty of humans quite sharply. Martians with superior minds and space travel capabilities were coming and humans were struggling to control bicycles and finding safety in their 3 small lights hanging against the entire black expanse of space.

In this chapter, Wells demonstrates his scientific background, mentioning such things as the nebular hypothesis and the spectroscope. He compares the manner in which the aliens observe humans to the way humans look at creatures under a microscope. However, he takes it one step further, from writings of a scientific (and sci-fi) tone, to that of social critique. To the aliens, humans seem as lowly as monkeys do to us, and mankind has not really hesitated to place itself above animals, even at the cost of their destruction. Wells also points out that the treatment of “inferior races” (as this written in the time of imperialism) has not been at all above reproach, citing the case of the Tasmanians, an entire people who were wiped out by European immigrants in just 50 years.

## Chapter Two (The Falling Stars)

### Summary

In Chapter Two, the Martian landing takes place and the news of it begins to spread. The narrator himself misses the craft streaking across the sky, but many other people see it, though they mistake it for a falling star. Early the next morning, Ogilvy starts out and finds the “meteorite” (as he at first supposes it is) near the sand pits in Horsell Common. Its impact on Earth has made a big hole and left the Thing itself mostly covered in sand. From what could be seen though, Ogilvy notes that it looked like a huge cylinder with a 30 yard diameter. He could hear a “stirring noise” coming from within it but it is too hot from its descent through the atmosphere for him to draw nearer.

“Then suddenly he noticed with a start that some of the grey clinker, the ashy incrustation that covered the meteorite, was falling off the circular edge of the end.” As he noticed this was due to it rotating very slowly, (think of the opening of a submarine hatch after it surfaces), he grasps that the Thing was not a meteorite at all,

but artificial, hollow, and with something alive inside. The flashes from Mars come to his mind and he makes the connection.

Excited, Ogilvy takes off for the nearest town, Woking. Although taken for crazy by the first two men he tells, he manages to get his story out to Henderson, a journalist, who quickly follows him back to the pit.

The cylinder is silent now, and, after hitting it with a stick provokes no response, they hurry back to town, believing whatever was inside to be dead. As the news spread, many, including the narrator, head off "to see the 'dead men from Mars.'"

## Notes

Additional foreshadowing is in this chapter, telling of the destruction that the Martians will bring to Earth. There were no birds or breeze the morning Ogilvy discovered the cylinder, much like the calm before a storm. Its landing had made a huge hole, and smashed the tree that had been standing there to pieces.

The chapter also says something of human behavior. The narrator does not see the Thing fall to Earth, though it would certainly have been "visible to [him] had [he] only looked up as it passed." Few took interest in what they believed to be a falling star; yet, by the end of the chapter, they are hurrying off to see the "dead men."

## Chapter Three (On Horsell Common)

### Summary

The narrator arrives at the scene of the crash landing to find Henderson and Ogilvy gone, having left to go to breakfast. A small group has gathered in their place, whose members also come and go. Some of the boys are throwing stones at the object but the narrator makes them stop.

Standing about the growing crowd, the narrator ponders that it is likely the cylinder did indeed come from Mars, but thinks it might contain a manuscript, rather than a living creature. Growing bored.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Narrator** - The narrator represents order and morals amidst the destruction and death caused by the Martians. Perhaps his writing on moral development has brought the narrator more in tune with his own morals, so that he is able to hold onto them with more success than others in the book. Therefore, even when the organization of society has collapsed, he still reluctant, and saddened afterward, to hit the.....

**Martians** - One thing the Martians represent is imperialism. When life on their world becomes difficult, they see Earth and set out to take it over with no attention of pursuing peaceful cohabitation. There are frequent remarks made by the narrator about the uncertainty of the Martians' view of men, whether they saw humans as creatures capable of thought and feeling. Much of the same thing could be said for.....

**Artilleryman** - As might be expected from his job, the artilleryman represents the military. There are different views of fighting presented here, as distinguished by the separate times that the narrator is with him.

The artilleryman in the beginning is the only one of his group that survives, as the result of an accident- his horse trips and he ends up pinned under it. This indicates that fighting often involves heavy .....

**Curate** - The curate represents religion, though in a very negative light. Like the artilleryman, by his very occupation, the curate is attached to the church. When this is destroyed by the Martians' Heat-Ray, he quickly falls apart and is left with nothing but fragmented thoughts that he has committed.....

**Brother** - A part of the story primarily to add an experience besides that of the narrator, the brother represents the similar ideas of civilization. He risks his own life to save the two women and .....

## PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is written about events that occurred six years previously and spanned only a little more than a month. For the most part, the plot follows in chronological order what happens between the landing of the first cylinder in Horsell Common and the narrator's return home after the death of the Martians. Exceptions to this include scientific details as were later learned and are inserted throughout.....

## THEMES ANALYSIS

**The possible submission of men** - This refers not only literally to the Martians taking over the world and reducing men to breeding purposes, but also in a symbolic way to men to machines, as was.....

**The inhumanity of imperialism**- The Martians' unfeeling conquest is meant as a criticism of British imperialism. They subjected those in the colonies to a status below that.....

**The horrors of war**- This includes not only the frequent scenes of dead bodies and buildings in ruins but also the mental toll. The artilleryman, who had been a devoted .....

**Science issues**- The conflict with religion is emphasized by the problems between the curate and the narrator. The opposition is further shown in the end, when St. Paul's cathedral has been damaged but the Crystal Palace (the site of the first world's fair, which was formed to.....

## POINT OF VIEW

The book is predominately told from the narrator's point of view as a recounting of events. This takes away something of the wonder over how the book will end since it is known from the .....

## OTHER ELEMENTS

**Hidden Meanings** - Many of the chapter headings have hidden meanings or allusions. "Under Foot" refers to both the burial of the house by the landing of the Martians' cylinder and the curate's behavior. "Dead London" seems at first to describe the bodies of men that lay everywhere and the.....

## QUOTATIONS - QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

Edition used: First Signet Classic Printing, December, 1986

1. *"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."* (p.1) The opening, and often quoted, words set up the tone and hint at the situation for the rest of the novel. The "mortal as his own" is foreshadowing. The comparison drawn between the Martians and man, and man and animals is one that will continue to be used throughout the story.

2. *"He compared it to a colossal puff of flame suddenly and violently squirted out of the planet, 'as flaming gases rushed out of a gun."* (p. 6) The flame and gun are some of the first war images in the book, as well as marking the beginning of the Martians' trip to Earth.

3. "By eight o'clock a number of boys and unemployed men had already started for the common to see the 'dead men from Mars.'" (p. 14) Though it says something critical about human nature that people are drawn to the scene of what they believe to be an accident, it also is an image that will be paralleled in the end, when the Martians will be dead in a pit with men looking down on them in excitement.....

## SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS

There are many symbols within the book but three that deserve some more analysis are:

**The pits-** Typically pits contain monsters and this is the case here, as this is where the Martians are found. When the cylinders land, the strength of their impact creates them, and it becomes their birthplace in a manner of speaking. The pits parallel the emergence of.....

## IMPORTANT/KEY FACTS SUMMARY

**Title:** The War of the Worlds

**Author:** H.G. (Herbert George) Wells

**Date Published:** 1898

**Meaning of the Title:** Refers on a literal level to the invasion of the Martians and man's attempts to stop them from taking over. The book can also be seen as a social commentary on imperialism, whereby the clash of worlds would be between the British and native peoples they conquered and ruled under the British Empire.

**Setting:** Britain (primarily around and in London; begins in town of Woking)

**Genre:** Novel (science fiction)

**Protagonist:** the narrator, who is never named.....

## VOCABULARY LIST

**Deputation** - delegation; the small group of men that approach the Martians with a white flag

**Ululation** - howl, wail

**Kopjes** - a small hill.....

## STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

### Study Questions

1. The Martians left their planet because
  - A. Mars became overpopulated
  - B. they wanted to conquer Earth
  - C. Mars began to cool off
2. The Martians fired this many canisters
  - A. 5
  - B. 10
  - C. 20
3. The first canister was discovered here by this person
  - A. the narrator while walking in the woods
  - B. Ogilvy the astronomer in Horsell Common
  - C. Lord Hilton in his backyard
4. The first victim of the Martian attacks was....
  - A. an elderly teacher
  - B. a member of the peace party
  - C. a young shop assistant.....

## Answer Key

1. C 2. B 3. B 4. C 5. A 6. C 7. A 8. B 9. C 10. B 11. B 12. A 13. C 14. A 15. A

## **ESSAY TOPIC IDEAS / BOOK REPORT TOPICS**

1. Discuss Wells' reasons for mentioning specific roads and towns but not naming the narrator.
2. What effect does the mix of Biblical and mythological references have?
3. Was the ending (specifically, the Martians dying off from disease) expected? If so, what.....

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