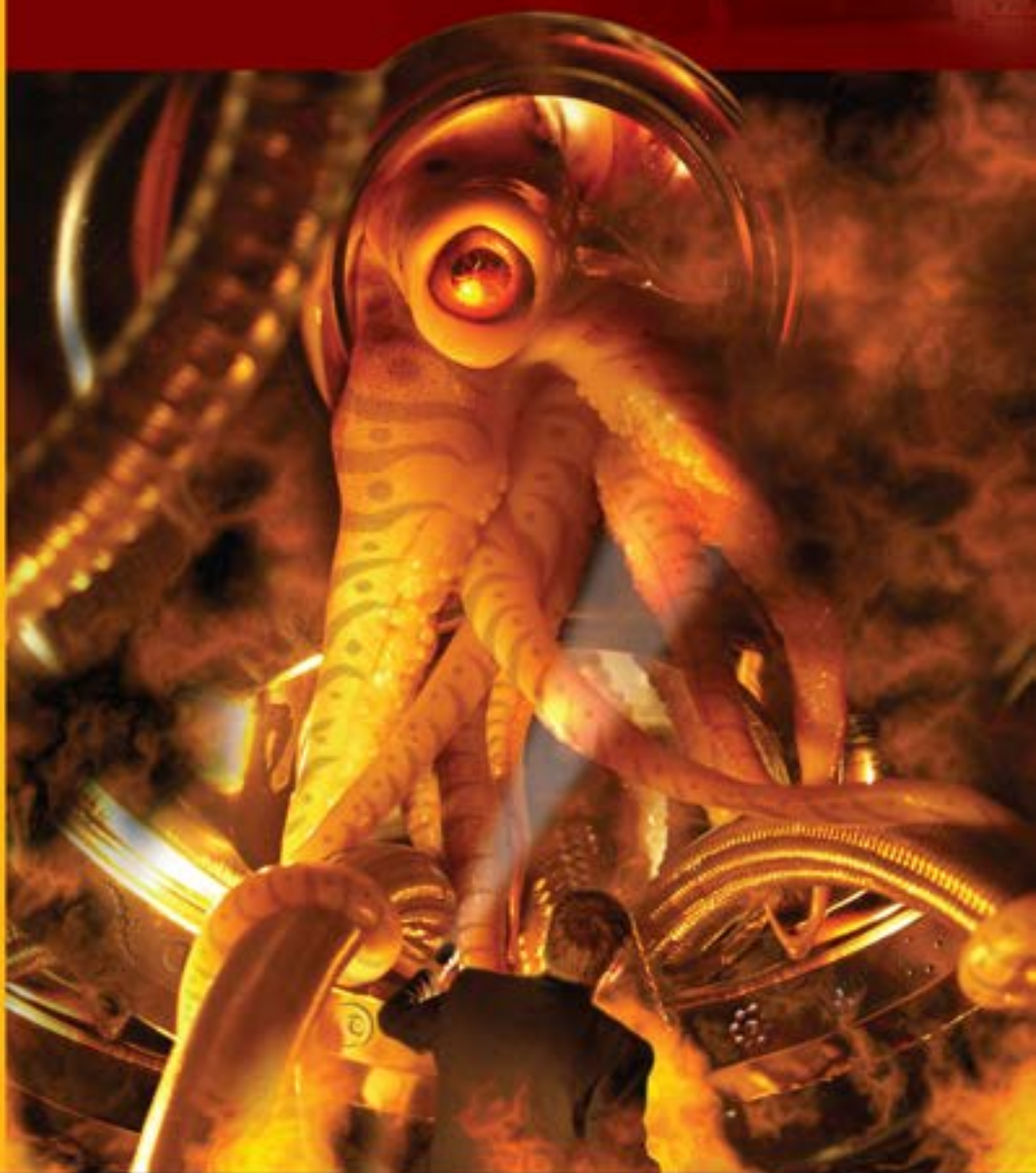


THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

by H. G. Wells

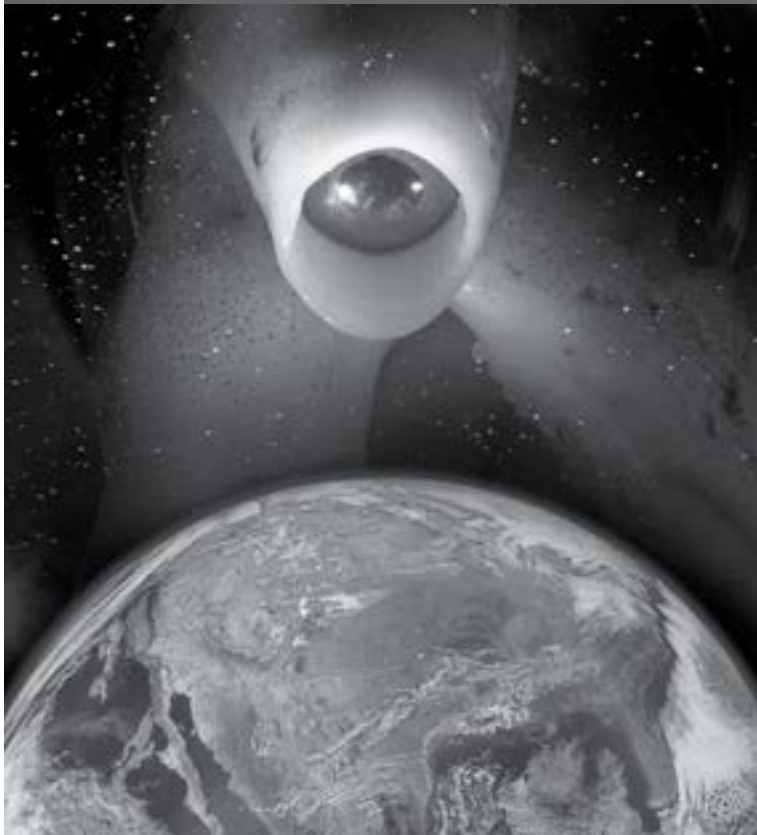


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UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS



H . G . W e l l s



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THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

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Notes

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

Herbert George Wells was born on September 21, 1866, in Kent, England, to a working-class family, who felt that the child would assume his proper place in British society as a common laborer. After a series of menial jobs that disgusted him, however, Wells found some pleasure as a teaching assistant, and he completed college in 1888.

Wells married a cousin, then divorced her; he later remarried and, despite numerous affairs, he and Amy Catherine Robbins remained together until her death in 1927.

His first book, *The Time Machine*, published serially in magazines and eventually as a book in 1895, was an immediate success with both critics and the public. Consequently, Wells had no financial worries for the rest of his life.

His next three books are very well known and helped cement his reputation as the father of modern science fiction: *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Wells also gained notoriety through his support of various causes, among them equal rights for women, evolution, socialism, and the improvement of humanity through the application of scientific principles. Despite his desires to be an advocate for social change, Wells is better known and respected for his many writings, which have been enormously successful through the years, both as novels and as movies.

H. G. Wells died of cancer in 1946, living long enough to see many of the ideas he formulated in his novels come to fruition.

READING POINTERS

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

As you read H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, be aware of the following:

Style:

Wells uses first-person narration in *The War of the Worlds*. The narrator is a scientist who is also affiliated with an astronomer. Having this scientific connection gives the narrator a perspective that is much different and much more detailed than other individuals who experience the Martian invasion. The narrator has information that only a few citizens possess. However, the narrator's perspective changes for a few chapters, and the destruction and chaos is seen through the eyes of the narrator's brother; this technique gives readers insight into how the general public deals with and feels about the Martians.

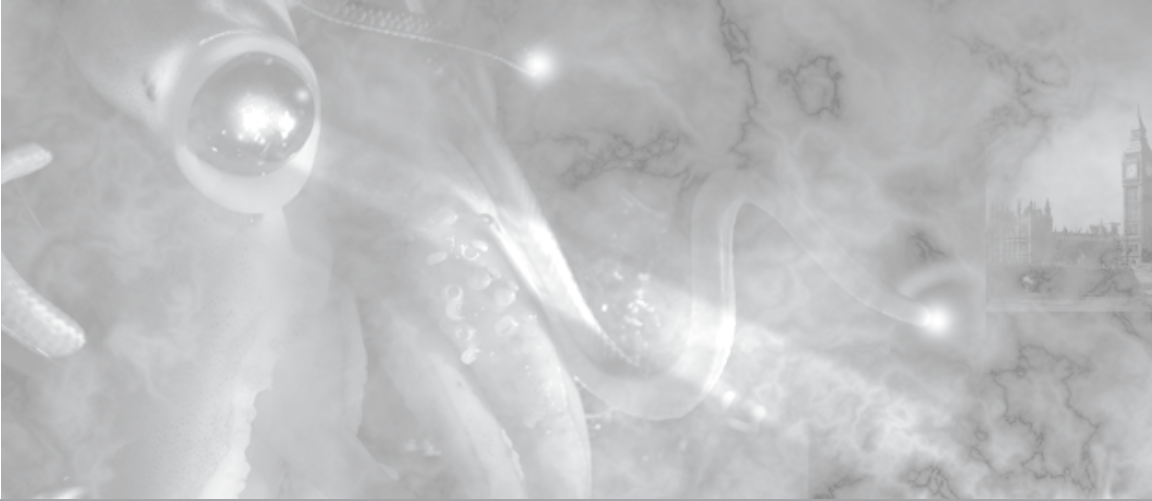
Wells, as a late-nineteenth century author, uses many literary terms, complicated sentence structure, and difficult vocabulary throughout the novel. These techniques may be slight barriers to understanding and enjoying the novel, but the plot and descriptions in *The War of the Worlds* are compelling enough that these obstacles are easily overcome.

Setting:

Since the story of the Martian destruction takes place in and around London, England, it was necessary for Wells to list the neighborhoods, landmarks, and cities that the invaders destroy. This technique would have enabled the British reader of the time to identify more closely with the areas that are under attack. It does, however, pose a problem for an American reader. Many of the places Wells mentions are listed and explained in the Glossary, which should help clear up any confusion about them.

Verisimilitude:

In 1894, because the orbit of Mars was quite close to Earth's, astronomers from around the globe were able to observe it carefully for the first time in modern history. They were able to see the irregular features on the planet's surface, such as deep cracks, fissures, and what



BOOK I

THE COMING OF THE MARTIANS

C H A P T E R I

THE EVE OF THE WAR

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. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days. At most terrestrial men fancied there might be other men upon Mars, perhaps inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and

surely drew their plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.

The planet Mars, I scarcely need remind the reader, 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 begin. It has air and water and all that is necessary for the support of animated existence.

Yet so vain is man, and so blinded by his vanity, that no writer, up to the very end of the nineteenth century, expressed any idea that intelligent life might have developed there far, or indeed at all, beyond its earthly level. Nor was it generally understood that since Mars is older than our earth, with scarcely a quarter of the superficial area and remoter from the sun, it necessarily follows that it is not only more distant from time's beginning but nearer its end.

The secular cooling that must some day overtake our planet has already gone far indeed with our neighbour. Its physical condition is still largely a mystery, but we know now that even in its equatorial region the midday temperature barely approaches that of our coldest winter. Its air is much more attenuated than ours, its oceans have shrunk until they cover but a third of its surface, and as its slow seasons change huge snowcaps gather and melt about either pole and periodically inundate its temperate zones. That last stage of exhaustion, which to us is still incredibly remote, has become a present-day problem for the inhabitants of Mars. The immediate pressure of necessity has brightened their intellects, enlarged their powers, and hardened their hearts. And looking across space with instruments, and intelligences such as we have scarcely dreamed of, they see, at its nearest distance only 35,000,000 of miles sunward of them, a morning star of hope,[†] our own warmer planet, green with vegetation and grey with water, with a cloudy atmosphere eloquent of fertility, with glimpses through its drifting cloud wisps of broad stretches of populous country and narrow, navy-crowded seas.

And we men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to them at least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us. The intellectual side of man already admits that life is an incessant struggle for existence, and it would seem that this too is the belief of the minds upon Mars. Their world is far gone in its cooling and this world is still crowded with life, but crowded only with what they regard as inferior animals. To carry warfare

[†]Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.

sunward is, indeed, their only escape from the destruction that, generation after generation, creeps upon them.

And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished bison[†] and the dodo,[†] but upon its inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years.[†] Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?

The Martians seem to have calculated their descent with amazing subtlety—their mathematical learning is evidently far in excess of ours—and to have carried out their preparations with a well-nigh perfect unanimity. Had our instruments permitted it, we might have seen the gathering trouble far back in the nineteenth century. Men like Schiaparelli[†] watched the red planet[†]—it is odd, by-the-bye, that for countless centuries Mars has been the star of war[†]—but failed to interpret the fluctuating appearances of the markings they mapped so well. All that time the Martians must have been getting ready.

During the opposition of 1894[†] a great light was seen on the illuminated part of the disk, first at the Lick Observatory,[†] then by Perrotin of Nice,[†] and then by other observers. English readers heard of it first in the issue of *Nature*[†] dated August 2. I am inclined to think that this blaze may have been the casting of the huge gun, in the vast pit sunk into their planet, from which their shots were fired at us. Peculiar markings, as yet unexplained, were seen near the site of that outbreak during the next two oppositions.

The storm burst upon us six years ago now. As Mars approached opposition, Lavelle of Java[†] set the wires of the Astronomical Exchange[†] palpitating with the amazing intelligence of a huge outbreak of incandescent gas upon the planet. It had occurred towards midnight of the twelfth; and the spectroscope, to which he had at once resorted, indicated a mass of flaming gas, chiefly hydrogen, moving with an enormous velocity towards this earth. This jet of fire had become invisible about a quarter past twelve. 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.”

A singularly appropriate phrase it proved. Yet the next day there was nothing of this in the papers except a little note in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the world went in ignorance of one of the gravest dangers that ever threatened the human race. I might not have heard of the eruption at all had I not met Ogilvy, the well-known astronomer,[†] at Ottershaw.[†] He was immensely excited at the news, and in the excess of his feelings invited me up to take a turn with him that night in a scrutiny of the red planet.

In spite of all that has happened since, I still remember that vigil very

distinctly: the black and silent observatory, the shadowed lantern throwing a feeble glow upon the floor in the corner, the steady ticking of the clockwork of the telescope, the little slit in the roof—an oblong profundity with the stardust streaked across it. Ogilvy moved about, invisible but audible. Looking through the telescope, one saw a circle of deep blue and the little round planet swimming in the field. It seemed such a little thing, so bright and small and still, faintly marked with transverse stripes, and slightly flattened from the perfect round. But so little it was, so silvery warm—a pin's-head of light! It was as if it quivered, but really this was the telescope vibrating with the activity of the clockwork that kept the planet in view.

As I watched, the planet seemed to grow larger and smaller and to advance and recede, but that was simply that my eye was tired. Forty millions of miles it was from us—more than forty millions of miles of void. Few people realise the immensity of vacancy in which the dust of the material universe swims.

Near it in the field, I remember, were three faint points of light, three telescopic stars infinitely remote, and all around it was the unfathomable darkness of empty space. You know how that blackness looks on a frosty starlight night. In a telescope it seems far profounder. And invisible to me because it was so remote and small, flying swiftly and steadily towards me across that incredible distance, drawing nearer every minute by so many thousands of miles, came the Thing they were sending us, the Thing that was to bring so much struggle and calamity and death to the earth. I never dreamed of it then as I watched; no one on earth dreamed of that unerring missile.

That night, too, there was another jetting out of gas from the distant planet. I saw it. A reddish flash at the edge, the slightest projection of the outline just as the chronometer struck midnight; and at that I told Ogilvy and he took my place. The night was warm and I was thirsty, and I went stretching my legs clumsily and feeling my way in the darkness, to the little table where the siphon stood, while Ogilvy exclaimed at the streamer of gas that came out towards us.

That night another invisible missile started on its way to the earth from Mars, just a second or so under twenty-four hours after the first one. I remember how I sat on the table there in the blackness, with patches of green and crimson swimming before my eyes. I wished I had a light to smoke by, little suspecting the meaning of the minute gleam I had seen and all that it would presently bring me. Ogilvy watched till one, and then gave it up; and we lit the lantern and walked over to his house. Down below in the darkness were Ottershaw and Chertsey[†] and all their hundreds of people, sleeping in peace.

He was full of speculation that night about the condition of Mars, and

Glossary

Book One

Chapter I

nebular hypothesis – a theory about the creation of the solar system. The theory states that an expansive cloud of gas and dust (nebula) began to collapse, which created matter that then became the sun, planets, and moons.

morning star of hope – The “morning star” is Venus, a planet that shines brightest right before dawn. This is a reference to the Martians’ seeing a planet better than their own; the earth is the “morning star of hope” to them.

vanished bison – By the time the novel was written, the American bison were almost extinct.

dodo – a large bird, extinct from the 1600s, that could not fly

“**The Tasmanians...fifty years.**” – Tasmanians were the natives of the island found by Abel Tasman and later navigated by Captain James Cook. When the British controlled the island, prisoners were sent to Tasmania to inhabit and civilize it. At the time of *The War of the Worlds*, the Tasmanians were all but extinct because of battles and disease.

Schiaparelli – Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli (1835–1910), an Italian astronomer who first saw channels on Mars

red planet – the nickname given to Mars because it appears red from the earth

star of war – In mythology, Mars is the god of war; therefore, the planet is called the “star of war.”

opposition of 1894 – “Opposition” is an astronomical term referring to a planet being on the opposite side of the sky as the sun. In 1894, Mars rose as the sun set, so it was easier to see the features of the surface of Mars.

Astronomical Exchange – a fictional group Wells created that spreads news about phenomena in the heavens

Lick Observatory – the first mountaintop observatory, located in California, founded by James Lick in 1874

Perrotin of Nice – Henri Joseph Anastase Perrotin (1845–1914), a French astronomer, who eventually became the director of Nice Observatory

Nature – a highly regarded scientific journal, founded in 1869 by astronomers

Lavelle of Java – actually M. Javelle of Nice, an astronomer who claimed that he saw lights on Mars in the 1890s; H.G. Wells changed his name to Lavelle of Java.

Vocabulary

Chapter I

adjacent – nearby, neighboring

alien – strange

animated – active, living

attenuated – thinned

chronometer – a timepiece, clock

complacency – self-satisfaction, contentment

disillusionment – disappointment, disenchantment

enterprise – an endeavor

extermination – total destruction

excursionists – tourists, travelers

fluctuating – irregular, changing

illuminated – lit

incandescent – luminous, glowing

incessant – constant, unceasing

infinite – unlimited

infusoria – a microscopic organism

inundate – to flood

minute – small, tiny

molten – liquid, flowing

palpitating – throbbing, pulsing

petty – unimportant, trivial

presently – soon

profounder – deeper

profundity – a deep area

ruthless – cruel, merciless

scoffed – mocked

scrutinised – examined, inspected

secular – material, earthly

seriocomic – serious and humorous

shunting – changing, shifting (from one track to another)

siphon – a tube, hose

spectroscope – a scientific instrument for viewing spectrum (spectra)

speculation – an assumption, guess

subtlety – detail

terrestrial – earthly

tranquil – calm, peaceful

transient – passing, short-lived

transverse – crosswise

unanimity – an agreement