

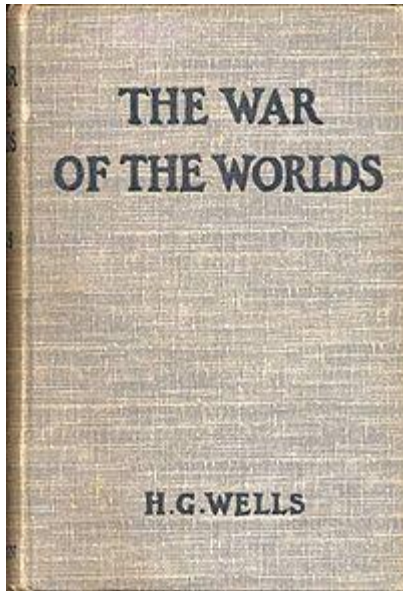
# *The War of the Worlds*

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## *The War of the Worlds*



Cover of the first edition

<b>Author(s)</b>	<a href="#">Herbert George Wells</a>
<b>Country</b>	<a href="#">England</a>
<b>Language</b>	<a href="#">English</a>
<b>Genre(s)</b>	<a href="#">Science fiction novel</a>
<b>Publisher</b>	<a href="#">William Heinemann</a>
<b>Publication date</b>	1898 <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Media type</b>	Print ( <a href="#">Hardcover</a> & <a href="#">Paperback</a> ) & <a href="#">E-book</a>
<b>Pages</b>	303 pp
<b><a href="#">ISBN</a></b>	N/A
<b>Preceded by</b>	<a href="#">The Invisible Man</a>
<b>Followed by</b>	<a href="#">The Sleeper Awakes</a>

*The War of the Worlds* (1898), a [science fiction](#) novel by [Herbert George Wells](#), 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](#). Written in 1895-1897,<sup>[2]</sup> it is one of the earliest stories that details a conflict between mankind and an [alien](#) race.

*The War of the Worlds* has two parts, *Book One: The Coming of the Martians* and *Book Two: The Earth under the Martians*. The narrator, a philosophically inclined author, struggles to

return to his wife while seeing the Martians lay waste to southern England. Book One (Chapters 14, 16, and 17) imparts the experience of his brother, also unnamed, who describes events in the capital and escapes the Martians by boarding a ship near [Tillingham](#) on the coast sixty-five miles northeast of London and is not mentioned again.

The plot has been related to [invasion literature](#) of the time. The novel has been variously interpreted as a commentary on evolutionary theory, [British imperialism](#), and generally Victorian fears and prejudices. 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 (it has never gone out of print) 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](#).<sup>[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)</sup>

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## [\[edit\]](#) Plot

Yet across the gulf of space, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded our planet with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.

After ten paragraphs of introductory remarks, the narrative opens in an astronomical [observatory](#) at [Ottershaw](#) where explosions are seen on the surface of the planet [Mars](#), creating much interest in the scientific community. Later a "[meteor](#)" lands on [Horsell Common](#), southwest of London, near the narrator's home in [Woking](#), [Surrey](#). He is among the first to discover that the object is an artificial cylinder that opens, disgorging Martians who are "big" and "greyish" with "oil brown skin," "the size, perhaps, of a bear," with "two large dark-coloured eyes," and a lipless "V-shaped mouth surrounded by "Gorgon groups of tentacles." The narrator finds them "at once vital, intense, inhuman, crippled and monstrous."<sup>[5]</sup> They briefly emerge, have difficulty in coping with the Earth's atmosphere, and rapidly retreat into the cylinder. A human deputation (which includes the astronomer Ogilvy) approaches the cylinder with a white flag, but the Martians incinerate them and others nearby with a [heat-ray](#) before beginning to assemble their machinery.



An army of Martian fighting-machines destroying England.

The narrator flees with his wife to [Leatherhead](#), where she has relatives, and then returns to Woking. He discovers the Martians have assembled towering three-legged "[fighting-machines](#)" (Tripods), each armed with a heat-ray and a [chemical weapon](#): the so-called "[black smoke](#)". These Tripods wipe out the army units positioned around the crater and attack surrounding communities, moving toward London. Fleeing the scene, the narrator meets a retreating [artilleryman](#), who tells him that another cylinder has landed between [Woking](#) and Leatherhead, cutting the narrator off from his wife. The two try to escape via [Byfleet](#), but are separated at the [Shepperton to Weybridge Ferry](#) during a Martian attack on [Shepperton](#). One of the Martian fighting machines is brought down in the [River Thames](#) by British artillery as the narrator and countless others try to cross the river into [Middlesex](#), while the Martians escape. Our hero is able to float down the Thames toward London in a boat, stopping at [Walton](#).



A Martian fighting-machine battling with HMS *Thunder Child*

More cylinders are landing across southern England, and a panicked flight of the population of London begins. This includes the narrator's brother, who flees to the [Essex](#) coast after Black Smoke is used to devastate London. The [torpedo ram HMS Thunder Child](#) destroys two tripods before being sunk by the Martians, though this allows the ship carrying the narrator's brother and his two female travelling companions to escape to the continent. Shortly after, all organised resistance has ceased, and the Martians roam the shattered landscape unhindered. [Red weed](#), a Martian form of vegetation, spreads with extraordinary rapidity over the landscape wherever there is abundant water.

At the beginning of Book Two, the narrator and a [curate](#) from Walton take refuge in a ruined building in [Sheen](#). The house is nearly destroyed when another Martian cylinder lands nearby, trapping them in the house for almost two weeks. The curate, traumatised by the invasion, sees in the Martians creatures heralding the advent of the [Apocalypse](#). The narrator's relations with the curate deteriorate, and he eventually knocks him unconscious to prevent his loud ranting. But not before he is heard by a Martian, who captures him with a prehensile tentacle and, the reader is led to believe, drains him of his blood: blood [transfusion](#) is the Martians' form of nourishment. The narrator escapes detection by hiding in the coal-cellar.

The Martians eventually depart, and the narrator is able to head toward [Central London](#). He once again encounters the artilleryman, who briefly persuades him to cooperate in a grandiose plan to rebuild civilisation underground. But after a few hours the narrator perceives the lunacy of this plan and abandons the artilleryman to his delusions. Heading into a deserted [London](#), he is at the point of despair when he discovers that the invaders have died from microbial infections to which they had no immunity, since "there are no bacteria in Mars."<sup>[6]</sup> The narrator realises with joy that the threat has been vanquished. The narrator suffers a brief breakdown of which he remembers nothing, is nursed back to health, and returns home to find his wife, whom he had given up for dead. The last chapter, entitled "Epilogue," reflects on the significance of the invasion and the "abiding sense of doubt and insecurity" that it has left in the narrator's mind.

## [\[edit\]](#) Style

*The War of the Worlds* presents itself as a factual account of the Martian invasion. The narrator is a middle-class scientific journalist somewhat reminiscent of Doctor Kemp in [The Invisible Man](#), with characteristics similar to Wells's at the time of writing. The reader learns

very little about the background of the narrator or indeed of anyone else in the novel; characterization is unimportant. In fact, none of the principal characters are named.<sup>[7]</sup>

## **[edit]** Scientific setting


Wells trained as a science teacher during the latter half of the 1880s. One of his teachers was [T. H. Huxley](#), famous as a major advocate of [Darwinism](#). He later taught science, and his first book was a biology textbook. He joined the scientific journal [Nature](#) as a reviewer in 1894.<sup>[8][9]</sup> Much of his work is notable for making contemporary ideas of science and technology easily understandable to readers.<sup>[10]</sup>

The scientific fascinations of the novel are established in the opening chapter, where the narrator views [Mars](#) through a telescope, and Wells offers the image of the superior Martians having observed human affairs, as though watching tiny organisms through a microscope. Ironically, it is microscopic Earth lifeforms that finally prove deadly to the invasion force.<sup>[11]</sup> In 1894 a French astronomer observed a 'strange light' on Mars, and published his findings in the scientific journal [Nature](#) on 2 August of that year. Wells used this observation to open the novel, imagining these lights to be the launching of the Martian cylinders towards Earth. American astronomer [Percival Lowell](#) published the book *Mars* in 1895, suggesting features of the planet's surface observed through telescopes might be canals. He speculated that these might be irrigation channels constructed by a sentient life form to support existence on an arid, dying world, similar to that Wells suggests the Martians have left behind.<sup>[7][12]</sup> The novel also presents ideas related to [Charles Darwin's](#) theory of natural selection, both in specific ideas discussed by the narrator, and themes explored by the story.

Wells also wrote an essay titled 'Intelligence on Mars', published in 1896 in the [Saturday Review](#), which sets out many of the ideas for the Martians and their planet that are used almost unchanged in *The War of the Worlds*.<sup>[1]</sup> In the essay he speculates about the nature of the Martian inhabitants and how their evolutionary progress might compare to humans. He also suggests that Mars, being an older world than the Earth, might have become frozen and desolate, conditions that might encourage the Martians to find another planet on which to settle.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **[edit]** Physical location



 'The Martian' in [Woking](#).

In 1895, Wells was an established writer and he married his second wife, [Catherine Robbins](#), moving with her to the town of [Woking](#) in [Surrey](#). Here he spent his mornings walking or cycling in the surrounding countryside, and his afternoons writing. The original idea for *The War of the Worlds* came from his brother, during one of these walks, pondering on what it might be like if alien beings were to suddenly descend on the scene and start attacking its inhabitants.<sup>[14]</sup>

Much of *The War of the Worlds* takes place around Woking and nearby suburbs. The initial landing site of the Martian invasion force, [Horsell Common](#), was an open area close to Wells's home. In the preface to the Atlantic edition of the novel, he wrote of his pleasure in riding a bicycle around the area, and imagining the destruction of cottages and houses he saw, by the Martian [heat-ray](#) or the [red weed](#).<sup>[7]</sup> While writing the novel, Wells enjoyed shocking his friends by revealing details of the story, and how it was bringing total destruction to parts of the [South London](#) landscape that were familiar to them. The characters of the artilleryman, the curate and the medical student were also based on acquaintances in [Woking](#) and [Surrey](#).<sup>[15]</sup>

In the present day, a 7 metre (23 feet) high sculpture of a tripod fighting machine, entitled 'The Martian', based on the description in *The War of the Worlds*, stands in Crown Passage, close to the local railway station, in [Woking](#) designed and constructed by artist, Michael Condon.<sup>[16]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Cultural setting

His depiction of suburban late Victorian culture in the novel, was an accurate reflection of his own experiences at the time of writing.<sup>[17]</sup> In the late 19th Century the [British Empire](#) was the predominant colonial and military power on the globe, making its domestic heart a poignant and terrifying starting point for an invasion by aliens with their own imperialist agenda.<sup>[18]</sup> He also drew upon a common fear which had emerged in the years approaching the turn of the century, known at the time as [Fin de siècle](#) or 'end of the age', which anticipated apocalypse at midnight on the last day of 1899.<sup>[15]</sup>



## [\[edit\]](#) Publication

In the late 1890s it was common for novels, prior to full volume publication, to be serialised in magazines or newspapers, with each part of the serialisation ending upon a cliff hanger to entice audiences to buy the next edition. This is a practice familiar from the first publication of [Charles Dickens'](#) novels in the nineteenth century. *The War of the Worlds* was first published in serial form in [Pearson's Magazine](#) in 1897.<sup>[19]</sup> Wells was paid £200 and Pearsons demanded to know the ending of the piece before committing to publish.<sup>[20]</sup>

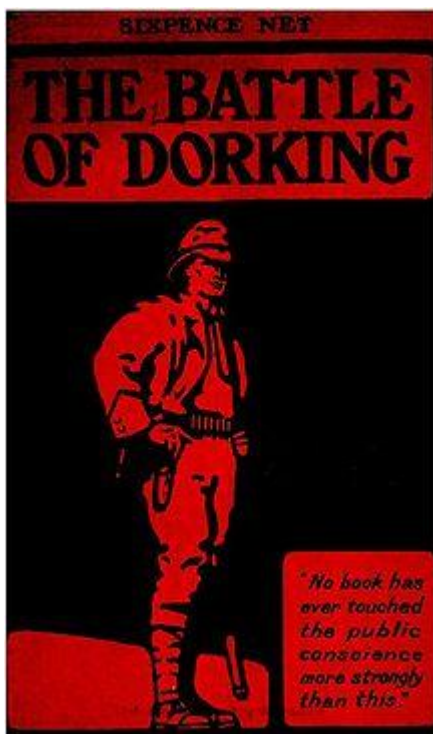
The complete volume was published by [William Heinemann](#) in 1898 and has been in print ever since.

An unauthorised serialisation of the novel was published in the [United States](#) prior to this, in [New York](#) in 1897.<sup>[21]</sup> A pirated version involving the Martians landing in [New England](#) was published by the [Boston Post](#) in 1898, which Wells protested against.<sup>[8]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Reception

*The War of the Worlds* was generally received very favourably by both readers and critics upon its publication. There was however some criticism of the brutal nature of the events in the narrative.<sup>[22]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Relation to invasion literature



*The Battle of Dorking* front cover

Between 1871 and 1914 over 60 works of fiction for adult readers describing invasions of [Great Britain](#) were published. The seminal work was *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) by [George Tomkyns Chesney](#), an army officer. The book portrays a surprise German attack, with a landing on the South coast of [England](#), made possible by the distraction of the [Royal Navy](#) in colonial patrols and the army in an Irish insurrection. The German army makes short work of English militia and rapidly marches to London. The story was published in [Blackwood's Magazine](#) in May 1871, and so popular that it was reprinted a month later as a pamphlet which sold 80,000 copies.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

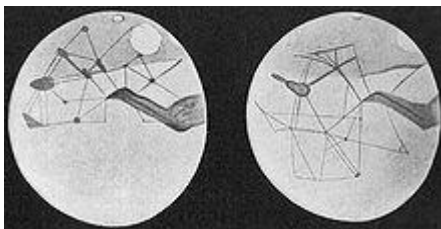
The appearance of this literature, much of which might be viewed as contemporary propaganda, reflected the increasing feeling of anxiety and insecurity as international tensions between European Imperial powers escalated towards the outbreak of the [First World War](#). Across the decades, the nationality of the invaders tended to vary, according to the most acutely perceived threat at the time. In the 1870s, the Germans were the most common invaders. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a period of strain on Anglo-French relations, and the signing of a treaty between [France](#) and [Russia](#), the French became the more common menace.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

There are a number of plot similarities between Wells's book and *The Battle of Dorking*. In both books, a ruthless enemy makes a devastating surprise attack, with the British armed forces helpless to stop its relentless advance and both involve the destruction of the [Home Counties](#) of southern England.<sup>[24]</sup> However, *The War of the Worlds* transcends the typical fascination of [Invasion Literature](#) with European politics, the suitability of contemporary military technology to deal with the armed forces of other nations, and international disputes, with its introduction of an alien adversary.<sup>[25]</sup>

Although much of Invasion Literature may have been less sophisticated and visionary than Wells's novel, it was a useful, familiar genre to support the publication success of the piece, attracting readers used to such tales. It may also have proved an important foundation for Wells's ideas, as he had never seen or fought in a war.<sup>[26]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Scientific predictions and accuracy

### [\[edit\]](#) Mars



Martian canals depicted by Percival Lowell.







The arid, lifeless surface of Mars as seen by the Viking Probe.

Many novels focusing on life on other planets written close to 1900 echo scientific ideas of the time, including [Pierre-Simon Laplace's nebular hypothesis](#), [Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection](#), and [Gustav Kirchhoff's theory of Spectroscopy](#). These scientific ideas combined to present the possibility that planets are alike in composition and conditions for the development of species, which would likely lead to the emergence of life at a suitable geological age in a planet's development.<sup>[27]</sup>

By the time Wells came to write *The War of the Worlds*, there had been three centuries of observation of Mars through telescopes. [Galileo](#), in 1610, observed the planet's phases and in 1666 [Giovanni Cassini](#) identified the polar ice caps.<sup>[12]</sup> In 1878, Italian astronomer, [Giovanni Virginio Schiaparelli](#) observed geological features which he called [canali](#) (Italian for "channels"). This was mistranslated into English as "canals" which, being artificial watercourses, fuelled the belief that there was some sort of intelligent extraterrestrial life on the planet. It has been suggested in recent years, that the canals were actually the result of a disease that made Giovanni see his own eye structure which he assumed were canals. This further influenced American astronomer [Percival Lowell](#).<sup>[28]</sup>

In 1895 Lowell published a book entitled *Mars* which speculated about an arid, dying landscape, whose inhabitants had been forced to build canals thousands of miles long to bring water from the polar caps to irrigate the remaining arable land. This formed the most advanced scientific ideas about the conditions on the red planet available to Wells at the time *War of the Worlds* was written. The concept of canals with flowing water was later proved erroneous by more accurate observation of the planet, and later landings by Russian and American probes such as the two [Viking missions](#) which found a lifeless world too cold for water to exist in its liquid state.<sup>[12]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Space travel

The Martians travel to the Earth in [cylinders](#), 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.<sup>[29]</sup>

However, the 16 year old [Robert H. Goddard](#) was inspired by the story and spent much of his life inventing [rockets](#).<sup>[3][4]</sup> The research into rockets begun by Goddard eventually culminated in the [Apollo program](#)'s manned landing on the moon.

## [\[edit\]](#) Total war



 London during 'The Blitz' in World War II.

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 counties. 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 20th century progressed, particularly from the 1930s with the development of mobile weapons and technology capable of 'surgical strikes' on key military and civilian targets.<sup>[30]</sup>

Wells's vision of a war bringing total destruction without moral limitations in *The War of the Worlds* were not taken seriously by readers at the time of publication. It was seen as one of a number of fictions which proposed this idea. He later expanded these ideas with more realistic novels such as [When the Sleeper Wakes](#) (1899), [The War in the Air](#) (1908) and [The World Set Free](#) (1914). This kind of 'total war' did not become fully realised until the [Second World War](#), with the terrorising and evacuation of entire civilian populations, and the annihilation of cities.<sup>[31]</sup>

As noted by Howard Black, "(...) In concrete details, the Martian Fighting Machines as depicted by Wells have nothing in common with [tanks](#) or [dive bombers](#) - but the tactical and strategic use made of them is strikingly reminiscent of [Blitzkrieg](#) as it would be developed by the German armed forces four decades later. The description of the Martians advancing inexorably, at lightning speed, towards London; the British Army completely unable to put up an effective resistance; the British government disintegrating and evacuating the capital; the mass of terrified refugees clogging the roads - all were to be precisely enacted at in real life [at 1940 France](#). (...) Ironically, this 1898 prediction came far closer to the actual land fighting of [WWII](#) than Wells did much later, much closer to the actual war, in the 1934 "[The Shape of Things to Come](#)".<sup>[32]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Weapons and armour

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](#).<sup>[19]</sup> 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.<sup>[30]</sup>

Military theorists of the era, including the [Royal Navy](#) prior to the [First World War](#), had speculated about building a "fighting-machine" or a "land [dreadnought](#)". Wells later further explored the ideas of an [armoured fighting vehicle](#) in his short story "[The Land Ironclads](#)".<sup>[33]</sup> There is a high level of science-fiction abstraction in Wells's description of Martian automotive technology; he stresses how Martian machinery is devoid of wheels, using the "muscle-like" contractions of metal discs along an axis to produce movement. However, the [electroactive polymers](#) currently being developed for use in sensors and robotic actuators are actually a close match for Wells' description.

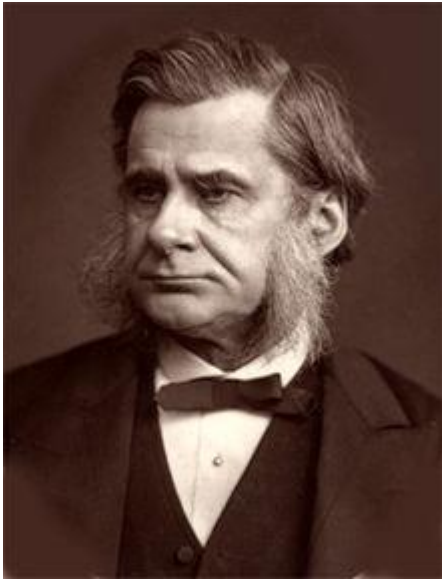
## [\[edit\]](#) Ecology




 [Kudzu](#), an introduced species in the United States, is difficult to control.

Wells's dramatisation of an [ecological threat](#) posed by a rapidly growing alien organism, the [Red Weed](#), which spreads over the English landscape, also has parallels in more modern times. Non-native species such as rabbits and [prickly pear](#) have been introduced into the Australian landscape, with a damaging impact. Another example is the spread of [Kudzu](#) in the [United States](#).<sup>[19]</sup> In the United Kingdom and the [Republic of Ireland](#), [Japanese knotweed](#) has become an invasive species. It was introduced in the 19th century.<sup>[34]</sup> However, these species were not introduced with the intention of causing deliberate harm.

## [\[edit\]](#) Interpretations



 Wells's Mentor, Darwinist advocate T. H. Huxley.

### [\[edit\]](#) Natural selection

H.G. Wells was a student of [Thomas Henry Huxley](#), who was a major influence upon him. Huxley was commonly referred to as 'Darwin's bulldog'. This was as a result of his vigorous defence of [Charles Darwin's](#) theory of [natural selection](#) against criticism by the [Victorian](#) religious establishment during the later half of the nineteenth century. They saw the theory of natural selection as an attempt to suggest that the development of life on earth did not require any kind of supernatural explanation such as a divine creator. Darwin's theory suggested that every species was competing to survive in a given environment and the species which had evolved the most useful biological adaptations to that environment, was most likely to survive and produce offspring also possessing these useful characteristics.<sup>[35]</sup>

In the novel, the conflict between mankind and the Martians is portrayed as a similar struggle. It is a survival of the fittest, with the Martians whose longer period of successful evolution on the older Mars, has led to them developing a superior intelligence, able to create weapons far in advance of humans on the younger planet Earth, who have not had the opportunity to develop sufficient intelligence to construct similar weapons.<sup>[35]</sup>

### [\[edit\]](#) Human evolution

The novel also suggests a potential future for human evolution and perhaps a warning against overvaluing intelligence against more human qualities. The Narrator describes the Martians as having evolved an overdeveloped brain, which has left them with cumbersome bodies, with increased intelligence, but a diminished ability to use their emotions, something Wells attributes to bodily function. The Narrator refers to an 1893 publication suggesting that the evolution of the human brain might outstrip the development of the body, and organs such as the stomach, nose, teeth and hair would wither, leaving humans as thinking machines, needing mechanical devices much like the Tripod fighting machines, to be able to interact with their environment. This publication is probably Wells's own "The Man of the Year Million", published in the [Pall Mall Gazette](#) on November 6, 1893, which suggests similar ideas.<sup>[36][37]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Colonialism and imperialism



Stamp showing British Empire at time of *The War of the Worlds* publication. Egypt was also under de facto British rule

At the time of the novel's publication the [British Empire](#) was in its most aggressive phase of expansion, having conquered and colonised dozens of territories in [Africa](#), [Australia](#), [North](#) and [South America](#), the [Middle East](#), [South](#) and [Southeast Asia](#), and [Atlantic](#) and [Pacific](#) islands. It was one of a number of European empires, whose competition to conquer other nations was one factor that eventually led to the [First World War](#).<sup>[18]</sup>

While [Invasion Literature](#) had provided an imaginative foundation for the idea of the heart of the [British Empire](#) being conquered by foreign forces, it was not until *The War of the Worlds* that the reading public of the time was presented with an adversary so completely superior to themselves and the Empire they were part of.<sup>[38]</sup> A significant motivating force behind the success of the [British Empire](#) was its use of sophisticated technology; the Martians, also attempting to establish an empire on Earth, have technology superior to their British adversaries.<sup>[39]</sup> In writing *The War of the Worlds*, Wells turned the confident position of a reader in the [British Empire](#) on its head, putting an imperial power in the position of being the victim of imperial aggression and thus perhaps encouraging the reader to consider the nature of [imperialism](#) itself.<sup>[38]</sup>

Wells suggests this idea in the following passage from the novel:

And before we judge them [the Martians] 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 own 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?

—Chapter I, "The Eve of the War"

This also challenged the [Victorian](#) notion of there being a natural order, in which the [British Empire](#) had a right to rule through their own superiority over subject races.<sup>[38]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Social Darwinism

The novel also dramatises the ideas of race presented in [Social Darwinism](#), an ideology of some prominence at the time it was written. The Martians exercise over humans their 'rights' as a superior race, more advanced in evolution.<sup>[40]</sup>



Social Darwinism was a theory which applied Darwin's theory of [Natural Selection](#) to ethnic groups and social classes. It suggested that the success of these different ethnic groups in world affairs, and social classes in a society were the result of evolutionary forces, a struggle in which the group or class more fit to succeed did so; i.e., the ability of an ethnic group to dominate other ethnic groups, or the chance to succeed or rise to the top of society was determined by biology, not by the effort of individuals, and the offspring of the dominant groups were destined to succeed because they were more evolved. In more modern times it is typically seen as dubious and unscientific for its apparent use of Darwin's ideas to justify the position of the rich and powerful, or dominant ethnic groups. It was a theory exploited by the Nazis to justify their actions, was at one time used to justify the repression of women, and even used to justify sterilising people thought to belong to an inferior type.<sup>[41]</sup>

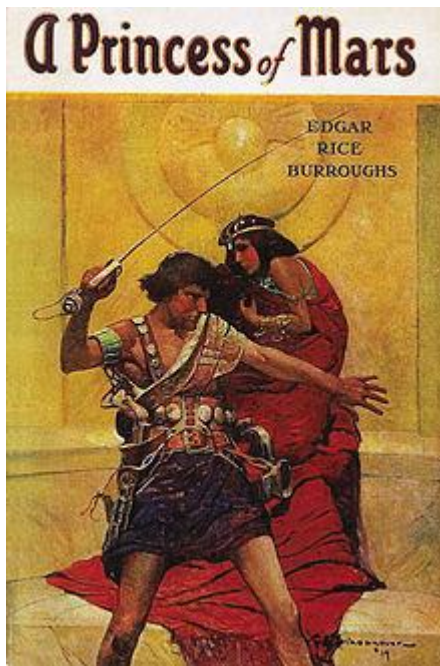
Wells was born into a family which, while middle class, was not well to do and matured in a society where the merit of an individual was not considered as important as their social class of origin. His father was a professional sportsman, which was seen as inferior, because this was an area that 'gentlemen' only indulged in as an amateur pastime. His mother was at one time a domestic servant, and Wells himself was, prior to his writing career, apprenticed to a draper. His achievements were hard won. Trained as a scientist, well aware of evolutionary theory, he was able to relate his experiences of struggle to Darwin's idea of a world of struggle, but he saw science as a rational system, which extended beyond traditional ideas of race, class and religious notions, and this gave his fiction a critical edge which challenged the use of science to explain political and social norms of the day.<sup>[42]</sup>


## [\[edit\]](#) Religion and science

Good and evil appear to be entirely relative in *The War of the Worlds*, and the defeat of the Martians does not involve any kind of direct divine action. It has an entirely material cause, the action of microscopic bacteria. An insane clergyman is a key character in the novel, but his attempts to relate the invasion to some kind of biblical enactment of [Armageddon](#) seem only to reinforce his mental derangement.<sup>[37]</sup> His death, as a result of his [evangelical](#) outbursts and ravings attracting the attention of the Martians, appears to be an indictment of his outdated religious attitudes making him a candidate for culling by natural selection, at the hands of the superior evolved Martians.<sup>[43]</sup> However the narrator twice prayed to his god (when he first lay in a bed for days and next when he discovered the defeat of the Martians).

## [\[edit\]](#) Influences





 *A Princess of Mars* cover.

## [\[edit\]](#) Mars and Martians

Further information: [Mars in fiction](#)

The novel originated several enduring Martian tropes in science fiction writing. These include [Mars](#) being an ancient world, nearing the end of its life, being the home of a superior civilisation, capable of advanced feats of science and engineering, and also being a source of invasion forces, keen to conquer the Earth. The first two tropes were prominent in [Edgar Rice Burroughs](#) "Barsoom" series, beginning with *A Princess of Mars* in 1912.<sup>[12]</sup>

Influential scientist [Freeman Dyson](#), a key figure in the search for extraterrestrial life, also acknowledges his debt to reading H.G. Wells' fictions as a child.<sup>[44]</sup>

The publication and reception of *The War of the Worlds* also established the vernacular term of 'martian', as a description for something offworldly or unknown.<sup>[45]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Aliens and alien invasion

Further information: [Invasion Literature](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) Antecedents

Wells is credited with establishing several extraterrestrial themes which were later greatly expanded by science fiction writers in the 20th Century, including first contact and war between planets and their differing species. There were, however, stories of aliens and alien invasion prior to publication of *The War of the Worlds*.<sup>[46]</sup>

In 1727 [Jonathan Swift](#) published *Gulliver's Travels*. The tale included a race of beings similar but not identical to humanity, who are obsessed with mathematics and are superior to

humans. They populate a floating island fortress called Laputa, four and one half miles in diameter, which uses its shadow to prevent sun and rain from reaching earthly nations over which it travels, ensuring they will pay tribute to the Laputians.<sup>[47]</sup> [Voltaire's \*Micromégas\*](#) (1752) includes two aliens, from Saturn and Sirius, who are of immense size and visit the Earth out of curiosity. At first they think the planet is uninhabited, due to the difference in scale between them and the peoples of Earth. When they discover the haughty Earth-centric views of Earth philosophers, they are greatly amused by how important Earth beings think they are compared to greater beings in the universe such as themselves.<sup>[48]</sup>

In 1892 Robert Potter, an Australian clergyman, published *The Germ Growers* in London. It describes a covert invasion by aliens who take on the appearance of human beings and attempt to develop a virulent disease to assist in their plans for global conquest. It was not widely read, and consequently Wells's vastly more successful novel is generally credited as the seminal alien invasion story.<sup>[46]</sup>

The first science fiction to be set on Mars may be [Across the Zodiac: The Story of a Wrecked Record](#) (1880) by [Percy Greg](#). It was a long-winded book concerned with a civil war on Mars. Another Mars novel, this time dealing with benevolent Martians coming to Earth to give humankind the benefit of their advanced knowledge, was published in 1897 by [Kurd Lasswitz](#) — [Two Planets](#) (*Auf Zwei Planeten*). It was not translated until 1971, and thus may not have influenced Wells, although it did depict a [Mars](#) influenced by the ideas of [Percival Lowell](#).<sup>[49]</sup> Other examples are *Mr. Stranger's Sealed Packet* (1889), which took place on Mars, [Gustavus W. Popes's \*Journey to Mars\*](#) (1894), and Ellsworth Douglas's *Pharaoh's Broker*, in which the protagonist encounters an [Egyptian](#) civilisation on Mars which, while parallel to that of the Earth has evolved somehow independently.<sup>[50]</sup>

### **[\[edit\]](#) Early examples of influence on science fiction**

Wells had already proposed another outcome for the alien invasion story in *The War of the Worlds*. When the Narrator meets the [artilleryman](#) the second time, the artilleryman imagines a future where humanity, hiding underground in sewers and tunnels, conducts a [guerrilla war](#), fighting against the Martians for generations to come, and eventually, after learning how to duplicate Martian weapon technology, destroys the invaders and takes back the Earth.<sup>[43]</sup>

## *The WAR of the WORLDS* By H.G. Wells

Author of "Under the Knife," "The Time Machine," etc.



*War of the Worlds*, 1927 reprint in *Amazing Stories*.

Six weeks after publication of the novel, the [Boston Post](#) newspaper published another alien invasion story, an unauthorised sequel to *The War of the Worlds*, which turned the tables on the invaders. [Edison's Conquest of Mars](#) was written by [Garrett P. Serviss](#), a now little remembered writer, who described the famous inventor [Thomas Edison](#) leading a [counterattack](#) against the invaders on their home soil.<sup>[19]</sup> Though this is actually a sequel to '[Fighters from Mars](#)', a revised and unauthorised reprint of *War of the Worlds*, they both were first printed in the Boston Post in 1898.<sup>[51]</sup> [Lazar Lagin](#) published "Major Well Andyou" in USSR in 1962, an alternative view of events in "War of the Worlds" from the point of a traitor.

*The War of the Worlds* was reprinted in the [United States](#) in 1927, before the [Golden Age of science fiction](#), by [Hugo Gernsback](#) in [Amazing Stories](#). [John W. Campbell](#), another key editor of the era, and periodic short story writer, published several alien invasion stories in the 1930s. Many well known science fiction writers were to follow, including [Isaac Asimov](#), [Arthur C. Clarke](#), [Clifford Simak](#) and in 1953 [Robert A. Heinlein](#) with [The Puppet Masters](#) and [John Wyndham](#) with [The Kraken Wakes](#).<sup>[21]</sup>

### [\[edit\]](#) Later examples

The theme of [alien invasion](#) has remained popular to the present day, some more recent examples in science fiction literature being [Footfall](#) by [Larry Niven](#) and [Jerry Pournelle](#), the "Worldwar" series by [Harry Turtledove](#) and [Orson Scott Card](#)'s [Enders Game](#). Examples from television and film include the 1980s [V science fiction franchise](#), the 1990s films [Independence Day](#), [Tim Burton](#)'s farcical [Mars Attacks!](#), the television series [The X-Files](#), and the xbox video game series [Halo](#), which depicts a futuristic war of humans fighting a highly advanced alliance of aliens called the Covenant.

Also, [Alan Moore](#)'s [graphic novel](#), [The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume II](#), retells the events in *The War of the Worlds*. In the end of the first issue of [Marvel Zombies](#) 5,

it is revealed that the main characters will visit a world called "Martian Protrcorate" where the events of War of the Worlds is occurring.

## [[edit](#)] Tripods

Main article: [Tripod \(The War of the Worlds\)](#)

Other narratives, in addition to utilising the alien invasion trope, also involve the appearance of tripod alien fighting machines. *The Tripods*, a science fiction trilogy for young adults written in the late 1960s by [John Christopher](#) is perhaps the most prominent example. The books, which were later part dramatised by the [BBC](#) in the mid 1980s, depict an invasion by aliens known as 'The Masters', whose superior technology easily defeats modern armies. Set centuries later, human beings are subdued by pacifying mind control devices, and watched over by the aliens, who use Tripods as transport. The tripods give no clue as to the nature of their occupants, and are worshiped by the majority of humanity. They are eventually defeated by a rebellion using rediscovered Earth technology and human ingenuity.<sup>[52]</sup> John Christopher admitted (in a [BBC](#) documentary called *The Cult of the Tripods*) that the alien war machines were inspired, at least subconsciously, by *The War of the Worlds*.

The computer game *Half-Life 2* is a more recent example, with an apparent homage to *The War of the Worlds* in the appearance of tripod fighting machines known as Striders used by the alien invaders.<sup>[53]</sup> With another example being the video game *Unreal Tournament III* with one of the vehicles used by the antagonists, the artificially sustained reanimated Necris, being a large tripod called the Darkwalker that functions very similar to those in War of the Worlds. Also, the Hunters from *Crysis* and the walkers from the sequel *Crysis 2* are also examples.

Similar vehicles are also introduced by the technologically and intellectually advanced [Protoss](#) race in *StarCraft 2*, called Colossi. These vehicles are equipped with twin "thermal lances" which do splash damage, making them exceptionally effective against masses of individual soldiers.

## [[edit](#)] See also



- [Adaptations of \*The War of the Worlds\*](#)
- [Deus ex machina](#)
- [Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century](#)

## [[edit](#)] References

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- ↑ <sup>**a**</sup> <sup>**b**</sup> <http://genesission.jpl.nasa.gov/people/biographies/goddard.pdf> Goddard Biography

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