

The **WAR** of the **WORLDS**

H.G. Wells

 TIMELESS CLASSICS



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Book 1—The Coming of the Martians

| 1 |

The Eve of the War

The nineteenth century was in its last years. At that time, no one would have believed he was being watched by beings of much greater intelligence. But the people of Earth *were* being studied—just as someone with a microscope might study creatures swarming in a drop of water!

All over this globe, people were still going about their affairs comfortably. (Is it not also possible that the creatures studied under our microscopes do the same?) Yet at that time, no one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as a source of danger.

A few earthly men fancied there might be

people on Mars. Surely, though, they were inferior. Yet, across the gulf of space, other minds were at work. And those minds were to ours as ours are to beasts. They looked at our planet with cold, jealous eyes. They carefully drew plans against us. The great downfall came in the twentieth century.

The planet Mars, I remind the reader, revolves about the sun at a distance of about 140 million miles. The light and heat it receives from the sun are barely half of that received by Earth. Mars is believed to be older than our world. It has air and water and all that is necessary to support life.

How could earthly men be so vain and self-important? Yet, until the very end of the nineteenth century, this was the case. No one dreamed that intelligent life might have developed on that distant planet.

In fact, a great cooling has occurred on Mars. Now the midday temperature barely approaches that of our coldest winter. This has become a problem for the inhabitants. Facing this problem has sharpened their minds and increased their powers. And it has hardened their hearts. That's why they look across space with

instruments and knowledge such as we have scarcely imagined. They see a morning star of hope. It is our own warmer planet—green with vegetation and gray with water. Martians have long been studying our broad stretches of populated country and vast, navy-crowded seas.

And we men, the creatures who live on this earth, must seem to them as lowly as monkeys seem to us. As their planet slowly cools, their population is shrinking—while this world is still crowded with life! In their eyes, however, it is crowded only by what they regard as inferior animals. They *must* carry warfare sunward! It is their only possible escape from the destruction that creeps toward them.

Before we judge the Martians too harshly, we must remember our own history. Our species has caused much cruel destruction. We've destroyed not only animals such as the bison and the dodo, but other human races. How could we object if the Martians made war in the same way?

The Martians seem to have much greater mathematical learning than we do. They have figured out their journey carefully. If we'd had better instruments, we might have seen the

trouble brewing far back in the nineteenth century. In 1894, when Mars was positioned closest to the earth, a great light was spotted on the planet. After that, whenever the planet came near us, strange sights were seen again. The Martians must have been getting ready.

Newspapers never made much of these sights. Our world went on—unaware of the grave dangers threatening the human race. I, too, would not have heard about the events—had I not met Ogilvy. The well-known astronomer invited me to join him in viewing the red planet.

Ogilvy was excited. He took me to the telescope and showed me three faint points of light. They were three tiny stars in the darkness of empty space. Each was flying swiftly and steadily across that great distance, drawing nearer to us every minute. At the time, I didn't dream that this *thing* hurtling through space was bringing struggle, misery, and death to our planet. No one on Earth had even dreamed of what was coming our way!

That night, as I watched, there was a jetting out of gas from the distant planet. It looked like a flash of red. Neither Ogilvy nor I suspected the

meaning of that gleam. In the darkness below lay the towns and all their hundreds of people, sleeping in peace.

Ogilvy laughed at the idea that Mars had inhabitants who were signaling us. His idea was that a heavy shower of meteorites might be falling on the planet. Or perhaps a huge volcano was erupting. He made a point of saying how unlikely it was that life had formed on the nearby planet.

“The chances of manlike creatures on Mars are more than a million to one,” he told me confidently.

Hundreds of people saw the flame that night. They saw it again the night after, and for eight more nights. Why the red flashes stopped after the tenth night, no one on Earth has tried to explain.

Then the daily papers finally woke up to the flashes. Notes appeared here, there, and everywhere about volcanoes on Mars. And all the while, unsuspected, those missiles the Martians had fired at us were steadily headed earthward. At a pace of many miles a second, they were rushing through the empty gulf of

space. Hour by hour and day by day they were coming nearer and nearer.

Now—after everything that's happened—it seems amazing. With that terrible fate hanging over us, we were going about our daily concerns as usual. For my own part, I was busy learning to ride a bicycle. At night I was working on a series of papers about my ideas of right and wrong.

One night (the first missile must have been very close) I went for a starlit walk with my wife. I pointed out Mars, an especially bright dot of light. The temperature was pleasantly warm. Lights twinkled out in the upper windows of houses as people were going to bed. The sound of trains rumbled from the railway station. Everything seemed so safe and peaceful then.

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Victorian England is riding high. People are so prosperous and smug they imagine themselves the masters of the universe. Then the unthinkable happens: *England is attacked by Martians!* Panic erupts as the countryside goes up in flames. Is there no way to stop the ghastly, machinelike creatures and their deadly heat rays?

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