

Understanding aliens
from h.g wells'
perspective as
depicted in his novel,
war of...



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There are plenty of pop culture icons that can be described as “extraterrestrial invaders;” however, there aren’t many in literature. Coincidentally enough, however, one of the first mentions of extraterrestrial invaders comes from literature: the Martians from H. G. Wells’ 1897 novel *War of the Worlds*. These horrifyingly ugly creatures roam the Earth in giant “fighting machines,” or as they are more commonly called tripods, and ravage all forms of life they encounter. Despite their obvious non-human appearance and power, they still suffer from the same pitfalls that humanity, and life in its entirety, suffer from.

H. G. Well’s Martians first appear in *War of the Worlds* during the first chapter, after a “meteor” falls to Earth and lands on Horsell Common, in Woking, Surrey. The mysterious nature of this “meteor” is further magnified by what it does next: it opens to reveal several Martians, who the narrator describes as “big and greyish, with oily brown skin,” “two large colored eyes,” a beak-like “V-shaped mouth,” and “Gorgon groups of tentacles.” Despite the thorough description of the Martians appearance, one still finds it hard to actually picture them. This presents the first strength of the Martian invaders: their supreme, God-like invincibility.

The Martians are regarded to by Wells as “minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the beasts that perish, [with] intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic.” Wells seeks to portray these Martians as God-like, giving them infinite strength and a lack of value for other forms of life; as a result, the Martians are made out to be invincible. For example, when the military surrounded the Hornell Commons in an attempt to contain the Martians, the military was armed with Maxim guns, which were considered to be the most

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advanced weapons ever constructed (this was the first automatic weapon, which looked much like a Gatling gun). Wells emphasizes the presence of these weapons because, when placed in historical context, the reader in 1897 would fully comprehend the awesome might of the Martian invaders.

In addition, the Martians roam the Earth in colossal "fighting machines," also known as tripods, which were armed with advanced weaponry: specifically, the heat ray and a black-smoke chemical weapon. These machines could be eliminated, but in one of the only instances within the novel which this occurred, it took three warships with massive power in order to do so. While in modern times it doesn't seem like these tripods would be very effective, when reading this piece through the glasses of someone from 1897, this is a massive show of the devastating power of these machines.

The second strength of the Martians is their inherent lack of moral compass. While on the surface this would seem like a weakness, particularly from the eyes of a human, in all reality it makes the Martians ideal invaders; because the Martians have no moral compass, they have no qualms with wiping out the human race in their quest for domination. In addition, because they have no moral compass, they have no need to be rational or fair. There is no such thing as diplomacy for the Martians in the quest for Earth; either humans learn to live under them or they attempt to rebel, either of which gets them killed. It made a rather effective antagonist for War of the Worlds.

Unfortunately for the Martians, their weaknesses are one in the same as humanity's. One such example is morality; while being portrayed as God-like and invincible, the Martian invaders can still be killed by the same means as

people. Those who managed to finish War of the Worlds know that, in the end, it was bacterial infection that finally killed the Martians. The simplest of all of God's creations, the common cold, destroyed the most advanced race of extraterrestrial beings in a major fit of irony.

The final weakness of the Martian invaders is the pivotal part of Wells' purpose in writing War of the Worlds: greed, the greatest vice of man. This greed is not a result of a need to survive, but a want for wealth. It is implied (and other versions of Wells' story directly state it) that the Martians have come to Earth in order to drain it of all of its resources. Wells mentions, within the first page of The War of the Worlds, that the Martians "regarded this earth with envious eyes." Clearly Mars is a wasteland, so it is no surprise that the Martians were envious of Earth. The Martians may very well have drained Mars of its resources before looking elsewhere to quench their thirst for wealth.

The importance of this is simple: the Martians, in their entirety, is an extended metaphor for British Imperialism and the British war machine. The elements of the novel add perfectly to equal it: the Martians see themselves as God like, and therefore have no value for life; the Martians seek to enslave the humans; the Martians must feed upon the humans in order to survive, just like the war machine needs innocent lives in the form of soldiers in order to continue; and the Martians moved like a swarm of locusts to rob the Earth of its resources, much like what the British Empire did to India and Africa. This type of metaphor was common during the era, which contained a massive amount of invasion literature; however, it was never done as well in other pieces as it was in War of the Worlds.

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Despite the strengths and weaknesses of the Martians, I personally would still like to actually speak with one of them, given the opportunity, because I admire their power, despite their human-like weaknesses. It is a mystery whether or not the Martians' motives were derived from greed, jealousy (the typical vices of humanity), or a simple hatred for humanity because Wells never expounded upon them within the novel. As a result, Wells has created an interesting and ambiguous antagonist that embodies fear, God-like superiority, and malice, all placed within an unfeeling and cold-blooded package.