

Tension and
suspense in war of
the worlds by h g
wells essay sample



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The novel is set in Woking, London, this brings a sense of reality to the reader as they can imagine it, and this is enhanced by the use of specific road names. The story kicks off on Horsell Common where the first capsule lands, all of the locals treat it as almost a festival, dancing, having picnics etc. Everyone is happy and doesn't think that the Martians will be hostile. When it emerges from the capsule the Martian kills all of the people on Horsell Common. Once this happens and people here the army is being sent in they feel happy that they are safe.

Once the army is also destroyed there is an air of panic as everyone tries to escape. The novel describes what H G Wells believed life would be like in the next century. The novel is a long way ahead of its time in predicting space travel and or exploration, he also predicted that civilisation would make a 'heat ray', what we now call a laser. Wells also introduces fighting machines, robots. He did still believe that we would use a horse and cart. The main theme of 'The War of the Worlds' is complacency, humans thinking they are a superior race - nothing can challenge them.

I will focus on chapter 4 book 2, 'The Death of the Curate'. In this the chapter the Curate goes mad and is murdered. The narrator is left alone, trying to escape from the Martians. H G Wells uses a range of effects to achieve dramatic tension. His first technique, which I thought was quite effective, is that he puts the characters in a 'dark, enclosed space'. This brings tension into the chapter by making the reader feel anxious and concerned for the welfare of the characters. The action of the Curate leads to conflict between the two characters, the Curate 'standing up arms outstretched... houting' leads to the Narrator trying to silence him - he fails.

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He then chases the Curate and murders him. This indicates how desperate he was to save himself. H G Wells brings a certain atmosphere to the text by using sudden exclamations where they are least expected, 'repent! ... God!'

At this point in the text the sentences are shorter, this is just before and during the action. For example, 'On the verge of screaming I bit my hand.'

This seems to speed up the action and contrasts with the longer sentences after the action where there is more descriptive style of narrative.

For example when the tentacle is described 'Like an elephant trunk more than anything else- waving towards me and touching and examining, the walls, the coal, wood and ceiling'. Clever use of sound details as the tentacle draws nearer in the middle of chapter 4, 'metallic jingle... bump... scraping... scratching... smash... rapping and tapping' are all used in the build up of the action and help to enhance the reader's perception of what the characters are going through. Towards the end of the chapter, a rhetorical question is used 'silence, had it gone?' This leaves the chapter on a cliffhanger.

The constant tension throughout the chapter supports an overall feeling of suspense. Knowing that the Martians are outside the building is a 'constant unseen threat' to life of the curate and narrator. Overall this key chapter is very compelling with lush descriptions and the violent death of the Curate. The whole chapter is summed up extremely well and adds to the overall effect of tension and suspense throughout the book. I think that his most effective technique was the use of sounds, this really enhanced my understanding of how he wanted the story to be told. I wouldn't think twice about buying another novel by H. G. Wells.

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