

What does "the war  
of the worlds" tell us  
about human nature



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"The War of the Worlds" was published in 1898 by the forefather of the science fiction genre H. G. Wells. At this time, the concept of Martians arriving on earth was revolutionary.

"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 earthy level"

Wells believed that all countries should have a democracy and wanted to explore the relationship between supremacy and subservience. He was interested in science and technology and explored new developments in a creative and imaginative way. He wanted to know what effect these developments had on human behaviour.

In the 1890s, England, along with the rest of the Europe, was a smug and complacent country. We invaded countries on other continents to gain their resources, Wells is fervent so therefore doesn't feel it is right for us to do this. This is why H. G. Wells believes that:-

"Before we can judge them too harshly, we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals ..... but upon its own inferior races."

He remains neutral towards the Martians, as their actions were parallel to those of the British Empire therefore ourselves. They have exhausted all resources on their own planet and are so desperate that to survive they need to invade our planet for our resources.

The human reaction was divided, with the majority of people being ignorant and immature a normal and timeless reaction to crisis, about the "men from Mars", while a small minority were intelligent enough to realize the enormity of the situation they were in and remained rational and calm. The majority of people included the newspapers that sensationalized what was happening, causing mass hysteria, making everyone go and see. This makes one man die due to stupidity, ignorance and the idea it is all just fun and games. The curiosity of the masses hampers any investigation scientists could make to gain a better understanding of the Martians and the situation.

When the Martians finally showed themselves to everyone they were met with great surprise as everyone expected to see a man emerge, but instead they got something no one could have predicted. The eyes resembled large luminous discs. Their bodies were "big greyish, rounded bulk, the size ...of a bear... it glistened like wet leather". The face "was a mouth under the eyes, the lipless brim of which quivered and panted and dropped saliva". The mouth was a v shape, with a pointed upper lip and a wedge-like lower lip. The creature had no chin and 2 groups of 8 tentacles. The Martians were sleepless and in fatigable. They didn't eat.

Instead "they took the fresh living blood of other creatures, and injected it into their own veins". This shows they are much more advanced than us, as they don't waste time eating and sleeping. For these reasons Wells admires them and sees them as the evolution of humans.

When the invasion begins, morality disappears. Even the narrator is selfish and bribes the landlord for his horse and cart. He doesn't even tell the

landlord the honest reason why. The worst of human nature is displayed, as anarchy breaks out. People are stealing, crushing others under foot and carriages, rejecting the sick and weak. Hunger, thirst and exhaustion lead to greed, selfishness and cruelty. Human barbarism is displayed. In times of fear and panic, religion and the army, the foundations of society, both fail. We look to the army for our protection but they are unable to do so, and the artilleryman had extreme, nonsensical views. We look to religion for moral comfort but "What good is religion if it collapses at calamity?"

The curate that he meets is hysterical and takes the Old Testament view that Weybridge must have sinned and is therefore being punished by God. He keeps questioning this over and over, "What sins have we done?" Surely he should be offering words of hope and guidance? The narrator, however, stays calm and tries to reassure the curate but fails. As the narrator spends more time with the curate he comes to realize that due to the "strange terrors" the curate has become a "creature of violent impulses, had robbed him of reason or forethought." He was an illogical man, whereas the narrator had a calm and rational manner.

When the Martians begin to die and subsequently decide to leave the planet it is not down to us,

Instead, they were:- "Slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared ... slain after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things God, in his wisdom, had put upon the Earth."

Nature is safer than science. We need to have more confidence in it. We need to learn lessons from what happened in the novel and become more

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humble and compassionate as a whole, as this is how we will survive and prosper.

In conclusion, the behaviour of humans as a whole, shows that we become barbarians in extraordinary circumstances. Human nature is very fragile as is our existence.

“ We cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a secure abiding place for man”

The story is both political and scientific. Wells believes we need to learn to work together in a calm and rational manner as this is the only way to protect both the planet and ourselves. This novel is still relevant today as we still have a blind faith in technology and we have caused global warming by ignoring nature and concentrating on technology that is destroying the planet and ourselves, due to technology new crime has come into play. How far will we go until we realize how our planet and its resources are not forever and that if we do not protect them they will die and us along with them?