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1953 film essay...



## **Differences between H. G. Wells' "The War of the Worlds" novel and 1953 film Essay Sample**

The War of the Worlds (1898), a science fiction novel by H. G. Wells, is the first-person narrative of an unnamed protagonist's (and his brother's) adventures in Surrey and London as Earth is invaded by aliens. Written in 1895, it is one of the earliest stories that details a conflict between mankind and an extraterrestrial race. Despite its age, this book is still a widely-enjoyed classic, and has inspired nearly 50 movies, 6 Broadway productions, and 2 musicals (one of which I personally own) in its time! 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' 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. The War of the Worlds has two parts, Book One: *The Coming of the Martians* and Book Two: *The Earth under the Martians*.

### **Part 1: The Coming of the Martians**

The first book begins with the narrative 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. 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. The narrator, shaken by the encounter, takes his wife to the safety of a nearby town and returns to London. He discovers the Martians have assembled towering three-legged "fighting-machines" (Tripods), each armed with a heat-ray and a chemical weapon named "The black smoke" by the narrator. 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, cutting off the route to 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. 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 the Martian's chemical gas 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.

## Book 2: The Earth under the Martians

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 Martian 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 civilization underground. But after a few hours the narrator perceives the lunacy of this plan and the overall laziness of his companion and abandons the artilleryman to his delusions. Heading into a deserted London, he is at the point of despair and offers his life to the aliens when he discovers that the invaders have died from microbial infections to which they had no immunity, since "there are no bacteria in Mars." The narrator realises with joy that the threat has been vanquished.

The narrator suffers a brief breakdown of which he remembers nothing, he is nursed back to health by a kind family, and returns home to find his wife, <https://assignbuster.com/differences-between-hg-wells-the-war-of-the-worlds-novel-and-1953-film-essay-sample/>

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.

#### Movie:

Although many movies have been inspired by H. G. Wells’ The War of the Worlds, in my opinion none do the marvelous piece of literature justice quite like the 1953 production of the same name. It is a loose adaptation of the H. G. Wells classic novel of the same name, and the first of a number of film adaptations based on Wells’ novel.

The film begins in the early 1950s, in southern California. Dr. Clayton Forrester, a scientist with the Manhattan Project, is fishing with colleagues when a large object crash lands near the town of Linda Rosa. At the impact site, he meets Sylvia Van Buren and her uncle, Pastor Matthew Collins. Van Buren says she saw the meteorite come in at a shallow angle, and Forrester observes it appears far lighter than normal for its very large size; his Geiger counter also detects it is slightly radioactive, but the object is still too hot to examine closely. Intrigued by these anomalies, Forrester decides to wait in town overnight for it to cool down. Later that evening, a hatch on top of the object slowly unscrews and falls away; a pulsating, mechanical, cobra-shaped head piece emerges, supported by the long goose-neck of a Martian war machine. The three men who remained behind at the crash site as night guards approach, waving a white flag, and the cobra-head fires a heat-ray, vaporizing them; it also damages a nearby electrical tower, knocking out the power to Linda Rosa. Dr. Forrester notices that his and other people’s watches have stopped running, having become magnetized; he then <https://assignbuster.com/differences-between-hg-wells-the-war-of-the-worlds-novel-and-1953-film-essay-sample/>

observes the sheriff's compass now points towards the meteorite crash site, away from magnetic north. Forrester and the sheriff go to investigate and are attacked by the Martian heat-ray; both manage to survive and then raise the alarm. Amid reports that other large meteorite-ships are landing throughout the world, the Marines surround the original landing site.

Three large, copper-colored, Manta Ray-shaped war machines rise from their gully and begin to slowly advance. Pastor Collins approaches them, reciting Psalm 23, his Bible held up high as a sign of peace and goodwill; the Martians disintegrate him instantly. The large Marine force immediately opens fire with everything in their heavy arsenal, but each war machine is protected by an impenetrable force field that resembles, when briefly visible, the glass jar placed over mantle clocks: cylindrical and with a hemispherical top. The Martians then use both their heat and pulsing " skeleton beam" rays to send the military force into full retreat. Military leaders of the Sixth United States Army later gather in Los Angeles to brief reporters and formulate a counter attack defense plan as well as prepare for an evacuation of major cities in the path of the Martians. Forrester and Van Buren escape the carnage in a small military spotter plane, but later crash land, barely avoiding colliding with other Martian war machines now on the move. They eventually hide in an abandoned farmhouse, but are trapped inside when another meteorite-ship comes crashing down, half-burying the farmhouse. Later, a Martian electronic eye attached to a long, flexible cable inspects the ruined farmhouse's interior but fails to notice them, finally leaving the ruins. When a lone Martian explorer later confronts Van Buren, Forrester quickly wounds it with an axe.

Forrester saves a sample of Martian blood on Van Buren's scarf after quickly using the axe to sever the thick, long cable of the returned electronic eye; he then grabs up the undamaged camera housing, and they quickly exit. The hovering war machine soon blasts the farmhouse, but Van Buren and Forrester have safely made their escape. They eventually rejoin Forrester's co-workers at Pacific Tech in Los Angeles. From the blood sample and the electronic eye's optics, the scientists make deductions about Martian eyesight and physiology, in particular that the creatures are physically weak and have anemic blood. In a desperate bid to stop the invaders, a United States Air Force Northrop YB-49 Flying Wing bomber drops an atomic bomb on the three original war machines, but to no effect, due to their protective force fields; the Martians continue to advance and the government orders an immediate evacuation. The Pacific Tech group must now come up with something, because they estimate the Earth can be conquered in just six days. As they evacuate, widespread panic among the populace scatters the Pacific Tech group; a mob steals their trucks and wrecks their equipment, and in the chaos Forrester and Van Buren are separated. All seems lost; humanity is helpless against the Martians.

Forrester searches for Van Buren in the burning ruins of Los Angeles, now under attack. He remembers something she told him, and he eventually finds her in a church with other refugees, waiting for the end. An approaching war machine suddenly crashes into a building, then another one falls nearby. Forrester soon discovers that the invaders are dying. As in H. G. Wells' novel, the Martians have no biological defenses against the Earth's

viruses and bacteria. The smallest creatures that “ God in His wisdom had put upon this Earth” have saved mankind from extinction.

### Part C: Comparative Essay

H. G. Wells' “ The War of the Worlds” was once of the first science fiction novels to become a classic, and have thus inspired multiple movies, but none do Wells' literary masterpiece credit quite like the 1953 movie adaptation. Although there are many differences in the plot of the book and the movie, the movie adaptation does an excellent job in capturing the terror and panic described in the literary work.

The plot of the film is very different from the novel: The novel tells the story of a 19th century journalist (with additional narration made by his brother in later chapters of the first half), who journeys through Victorian London and its environs while the Martians attack, eventually being reunited with his wife; the film's protagonist is a California scientist who falls in love with a former college student after the Martian attack begins. However, certain points of the film's plot are similar to the novel, from the crash-landing of the Martian meteorite-ships to their eventual defeat by Earth's microorganisms. Doctor Forrester also experiences similar events like the book's narrator: an ordeal in a destroyed house, observing an actual Martian up close, and eventually reuniting with his love interest at the end of the story. The film is given more of a Cold War theme with its use of the Atomic Bomb against the enemy and the mass-destruction that such a global war would inflict on mankind.



The film is also very different from the original novel in its attitude toward religion, as reflected especially in the depiction of clergymen as characters. The staunchly secularist Wells depicted a cowardly and thoroughly uninspiring Curate, whom the narrator regards with disgust, with which the reader is invited to concur. In the film, there is instead the sympathetic and heroic Pastor Collins who dies a martyr's death. And the film's final scene in the church, strongly emphasizing the Divine nature of Humanity's deliverance, has no parallel in the original book. H. G. Wells was a man of science, and had a very controversial opinion on religion for his time, as was shown in his novel. In an interview, Barré Lyndon, the man responsible for adapting the novel into a movie script, said that he left out the strong anti-religious overtones of the book because he felt that the viewers of the film may feel offended. And so his decision was, in reality, to ensure that the movie's overall reception would not be marred by an "offensive" religious standpoint.

Undoubtedly, the closest resemblance in the film from the movie is probably that of the antagonists. The film's aliens are indeed Martians, and invade Earth for the same reasons as those from the novel (the state of Mars suggests that it is in the final stages of being able to support life, leading to the Martians decision to make Earth their new home). They land in the same way, by crashing to the Earth. However, the book's spacecraft are large cylinder-shaped projectiles fired from the Martian surface from some kind of cannon, instead of the film's meteorite-spaceships; but the Martians emerge from their craft in the same way, by unscrewing a large, round hatch. They appear to have no use for humans in the film. In the novel they are observed

directly feeding on humans by draining their victims' blood using pipettes; there is also a speculation about the Martians eventually using human slaves to hunt down all remaining human survivors after they have conquered Earth. In the film the Martians do not bring the novel's fast-growing red weed with them, but they are defeated by Earth microorganisms, as observed in the novel. However, they die from the effects of the microorganisms within three days of the landing of the first meteorite-ship; in the novel the Martians die within about three weeks of their invasion of England. The Martians themselves bear no physical resemblance to the novel's Martians. The novels are bear-sized, bulkish creatures whose bodies are described as "merely heads", with a beak-like mouth, sixteen tentacles in two groupings of eight, and two "luminous, disk-like eyes". Due to budget constraints, their film counterparts are short, reddish-brown creatures with two long, thin arms with three long, thin fingers with suction cup tips.

The Martian's "head," if it can be called that, is a broad "face" at the top-front of its broad shouldered upper torso, the only apparent feature of which is a single large eye with three distinctly colored lenses (red, blue, and green). The Martians' lower extremities, whatever they may be, are never shown. (Some speculative designs for the creature suggest the idea of three thin legs resembling their fingers, while others show them as bipeds with short, stubby legs with three-toed feet.)

In conclusion, while the closest representation of Wells' book to ever come out of Hollywood, the 1953 adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* is still just that; an adaptation. Despite the fact that it is a wonderful science-fiction

movie, I feel that it should not bear the same name as H. G. Wells' literary masterpiece.