

**CONDENSED CLASSICS**

**THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**

By H. G. WELLS

Condensation by Alfred S. Clark



Herbert George Wells, the most discussed living novelist, was born at Bromley, Kent, on Sept. 21, 1866, the son of a famous professional cricket player. His mother was an innkeeper's daughter who had been a lady's maid before her marriage. The boy had an irregular education, but he was quick to learn, and at the age of 14, after working as an attendant in a store, he secured a position as assistant in a grammar school. He obtained a scholarship at London university, was graduated with high honors and taught science in a private school.

In 1893 he began to write, doing articles for, and later becoming dramatic critic of the Pall Mall Gazette. He was already interested in social conditions and an untiring student of science. These two interests he combined in the series of romances that opened with "The Time Machine." In novels and short stories he created startling fantasies of the future, displaying his most abundant invention in "The War of the Worlds." He often times discussed future wars in these stories and his forecasts were amazingly like what was seen on the battlefields of Europe.

In the meantime he had been writing stories about contemporary life and books about social conditions. These he turned to more and more with the years. Of his later novels, bristling with wit and ideas, those that have been most widely read and discussed include "Kipps," "Tono-Bungay," "Ann Veronica," "The New Machiavelli," "Marriage" and "Joan and Peter," his latest novel. Most popular of all was "Mr. Britling Sees It Through," generally regarded as the best war novel written in English.

**W**HAT I marvel at now, when I recall the days when the Martians were speeding earthward, is our unconcern. The skies were peopled with incredible evil, with unimaginably repulsive monsters armed with superhuman weapons. The catastrophic Things were harrying on, covetous of our greater and warmer planet, and lovers wandering through English lanes, with no thought of the swift and scorching death above their heads.

Through a telescope, I had watched one of the colossal squirts of flame on the rim of the tiny, red planet. It did not occur to me that these gaseous jets accompanied the firing of a mighty gun that had launched ten long cylinders into space. Learning to ride a bicycle interested me more than eruptions on Mars. The planet seemed so remote. Forty million miles away!

Oglivy, the astronomer, found the first messenger. He had seen it falling and supposed it a wandering meteorite, but its shape surprised him. It was cylindrical, fully 30 yards across the exposed face. It was so hot that he could not get near it. Then, to his utter amazement, the top began to unscrew. There was something in it, something alive! Not until then did he link it with the flashes on Mars.

Late that afternoon I saw the Martian. I was one of a curious crowd in front of the cylinder when the lid fell off. I peered into the black interior and fancied I saw shadows stirring. Thus something like a snake wriggled into sight. I stood stricken with terror. A round body, about four feet across, pulled itself painfully to the opening.

I had expected to see something like a man, fantastic perhaps, but two-legged. This thing was just an oily, leathery body, legless and armless, with a chinless and noseless face. Two great eyes, dark and luminous, were mirrors for an extraordinary brain. The creature panted and heaved, weighed down by the greater pull of gravity on earth. An intense loathing came over me. Suddenly, the monster toppled over, into the pit. Then I ran, madly.

From a distance I watched the Deputation that went out under a white flag. I saw three flashes of greenish light and darts of fire leaped from one to another of the little figures. Even as I saw them touched with death, I did not realize what was happening. Suddenly I knew and again I ran.

People nearby slept unconcernedly that night, although the Heat Rays had set half a dozen villas aflame and pine trees were red torches. We were sure that these dangerous invaders were fatally sluggish. A well-aimed shell would finish them. And while we slept, the Martians were methodically rearing those mighty machines that were so soon to shatter our neat theories about their helplessness. That night another cylinder fell and eight more were driving on.

It was the next night that I saw the striding Martians. "Boilers on stilts!" I heard them called later. I saw them by flashes of lightning and the glow of countless fires, clanking machines 100 feet high, moving upon three gi-

gantic legs like an exaggerated tripod driving on with an express-train's speed, smashing everything in their path. At the tops, crouched in metal hoods, lay the Martians.

Looking out from my windows at dawn, I beheld an abominable desolation, a blackened world that had been green and fair. I struck out for London and for miles saw not a living being. I had reached the Thames when I saw the Things coming, five of them. I ran for the water. Straight toward me sped one, but I might have been an ant in a man's path. It strode through the river and towered above Shepperton. Then six hidden guns belched together. One shell struck the hood and there was a horrible confusion of flesh and blood and metal. Something drove the uncontrolled machine on, crashing through the village, toppling over the church-tower, collapsing in the river. The others rushed to the spot and the air was filled with hissing of Heat Rays and crackling of fires. Shepperton leaped into flame. I staggered to the shore and when I looked up, the Things were bearing away the smashed machine.

I stumbled on, panic-stricken, dazed. The world was doomed. These monsters could slay with Heat Rays beyond the range of our biggest guns. Not again could we kill one of them by surprise. Terror stalked through London. To the horror of Heat Rays had been added the Black Smoke, a cloud of poison that blighted all living things. So London streamed in flight, 6,000,000 people roaring out along the highways until they were rivers in flood.

I fell into a doze under a hedge and there the curate joined me. He was half-mad with fright and clung to me. We plodded on to a suburb where we sought refuge in a deserted house. At midnight came a blinding flash. When day broke, we peered through a peep-hole and in the garden was a Martian. Embedded in the earth was another glowing cylinder.

For fifteen days I was penned there, so I saw more of the monsters than any other man now living. I watched their intricate machines—the automatic digger, the sensitive handling-machine like a metallic spider, so flexible and so swiftly sure that they seemed centuries in advance of our rigid machinery. I could study too the Martian habits. I learned that evolution had made them all brain, cold, remorseless intelligences unswayed by emotion. They neither slept nor ate; they were sexless and their young were hudded off, like the young of corals. Most horrible to me was the fact that they injected men's blood into their veins for nourishment.

It was this that drove me to act as I did when the curate went raving mad. I knew that his shouts would warn the Martians of our presence and I tried to silence him. He broke away and I caught him in the kitchen where I felled him with a meat-chopper. He dropped stunned and then I saw two dark eyes at the window. I fled to the coal-cellar and above me I heard a tapping, tapping, and then the noise of a heavy body being dragged across the floor.

I piled wood and coal over me when I heard that tapping at the cellar-door. Through crevices I could see the terrible arm of a handling-machine, waving, feeling, examining. Once it ran across the heel of my boot and I nearly screamed. Then it went away.

A week passed before I dared look out. About the peep-hole was massed quantities of the red weed that the Martians had brought—evidently vegetation on Mars is red. I pushed it aside and gazed out. The garden was deserted.

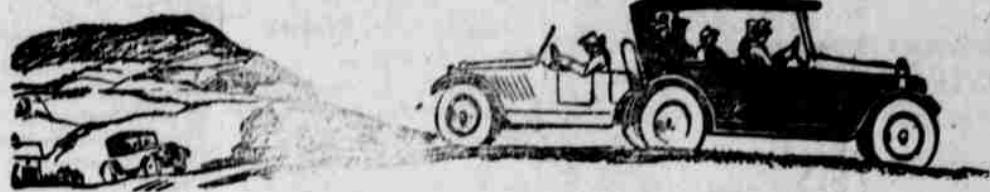
I crept into a desolate world. About me was a smashed village. I struggled in through the outskirts of London and not until I reached Wimbledon Common did I meet a man. He had food and drink and plans for the future, visions of a people living in the great drains until they had science enough to conquer their conquerors. I stayed with him until I had regained my strength and then walked into dead London.

The metropolis was stilled of all its humming life. Here and there were heaps of dead, withered by Black Smoke; here and there were signs of destruction but it was little changed except for the horrible quiet. I was near South Kensington when I heard the mournful howling, "ulla, ulla!" Not until the next day did I see the hood of the giant that was making this sobbing wall. He did not move nor did three others that I saw, standing strangely still. Driven by fear, I resolved to end it all. I walked toward the Thing nearest me and saw birds circling about the hood, tearing at something within.

I scrambled hastily up a great rampart and below me was the Martian camp. They were all dead, nearly 50 of them, some in their machines and others prone upon the ground. They could conquer man but they had fallen before man's most relentless foe, the disease bacteria of earth.

"Whatever destruction was done, the hand of the destroyer was stayed. All the gaunt wrecks, the blackened skeletons of houses that stared so dimly at the sunlit grass of the hill, would presently be echoing with the hammers of the restorers and ringing with the tapping of the trowels. At the thought I extended my hands toward the sky and began thanking God. In a year, thought I—in a year . . ."

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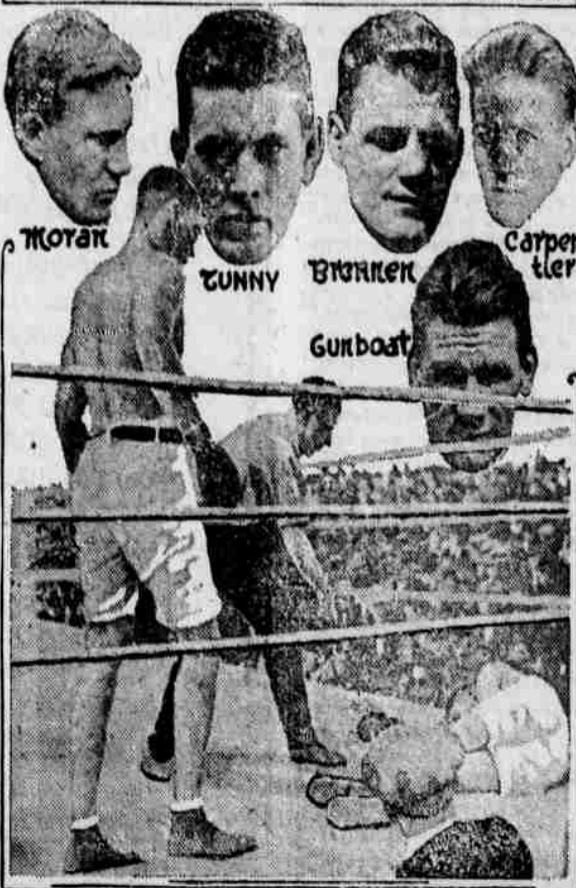
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