

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1

No one believed, in the last years of the nineteenth century, that our world was being watched. Men went about their work, calm and sure. They felt strong. They believed that they were the masters of the earth. They worked, they built, they wrote, they talked of money and trade and love, and they did not think of danger from the sky. Yet all the time, far away in space, other minds were looking at us. These minds were greater than ours. They were cold and patient. They studied our earth as a man studies small life in a drop of water under a glass.

Mars moves around the sun at a great distance. It receives less light and less heat than we do. It is older than our earth. Long ago, while our world was still hot and soft, life may already have begun on Mars. Because it is smaller, it cooled faster. Over long ages, its seas grew smaller. Its air grew thin. Snow gathered at its poles. Life there faced a hard future. If a world grows cold and dry, life must change or die.

The beings on Mars saw this. Their world was near its end. But when they looked across space, they saw another world. They saw our earth, bright and warm. They saw clouds, water, green land. They saw a planet full of life. To them, we were not great. We were like animals. And so they made their plans.

In those days, some men watched Mars through great tubes of glass. They saw lights. They saw strange marks. They did not understand. When a bright flame rose on the face of Mars, some wrote about it in small notes in the papers. Most people did not care. They went on with their lives.

One night I was with Ogilvy, the well-known man who studied the sky. We stood in his dark room, looking through the long tube of his telescope. I remember that night clearly. The room was quiet. A small light burned in one corner. The clock inside the machine ticked in a steady way. Above us was a narrow open space in the roof. Through it we saw the stars.

When I looked through the telescope, I saw Mars as a small round shape. It was red and bright. It seemed calm and still. Yet that night, just before midnight, I saw a flash on its edge. It was small and red. Ogilvy took my place and watched. He spoke in a low, excited voice.

“There it is again,” he said. “A jet of gas.”

We did not know what it meant. We thought it might be a great storm or fire on that far world. We did not know that something had been fired toward us.

For ten nights, flashes were seen on Mars. Then they stopped. People forgot. But the things that had been sent were already on their way. They rushed through space, faster than any shell from a gun. No one saw them. No one feared them.

I remember one warm night when I walked with my wife. We looked at Mars shining in the sky. I told her the names of the stars. People passed us singing. From the train station we heard the sound of wheels and metal. It all seemed safe. The signal lights shone red and green. The world felt peaceful.

Then came the night of the first falling star.

It was early morning. A line of fire crossed the sky over Winchester and moved east. Many saw it and thought it was only a shooting star. It left a green light behind it. Some said they heard a soft hiss.

I did not see it. I was in my study, writing. My window faced the sky. Had I looked up, I might have seen the strange thing that would change my life.

Early the next morning, Ogilvy went out to look for it. He believed that it had fallen on the common between Horsell and Woking. Soon after sunrise he found it. It had made a great hole in the sand. Earth and stones lay thrown in every direction. The heather burned in places, and thin blue smoke rose into the air.

The object itself lay half buried. It was a huge metal cylinder. It was about thirty yards across. Its outside was covered with a thick grey crust from its flight through the air. It was still hot. Ogilvy could not come close at first.

As he stood there alone, he heard a faint sound from inside. At first he thought it was only the metal cooling. Then he noticed something strange. The round top of the cylinder was moving. It was turning, very slowly.

He stared at it. A black mark on the metal moved from one side to another.

There was a dull grinding sound. Then the truth struck him.

“Good heavens,” he cried. “There is someone inside!”

He thought that men were trapped there, burned by the heat, trying to escape. He rushed forward to help, but the metal was too hot. He could not touch it. So he climbed out of the pit and ran toward Woking.

He tried to tell a man with a cart. The man drove on, thinking Ogilvy was mad. At last he found Henderson, a man who wrote for a London paper. Henderson listened. Together they hurried back to the common.

By then the top of the cylinder had begun to lift. A thin line of bright metal showed between the lid and the body. Air moved in or out with a soft hissing sound.

They shouted to the inside, but no answer came. They believed that whoever was within had fainted or died. They could do nothing more. So they went to send news to London.

By eight o'clock boys and men were walking toward the common to see the “dead men from Mars.” That was the story that spread.

I heard it from my newspaper boy. I went at once to the sand-pits.

A small crowd stood around the great hole. Some boys sat on the edge and threw stones at the metal mass until I told them to stop. People stared in silence. They seemed disappointed. They had expected bodies, not a huge metal shape.

I climbed down into the pit. Up close, the object seemed stranger. The grey crust did not look like rust. The yellow-white metal beneath was not like any metal I knew. I believed it had come from Mars. But I did not believe that anything living was inside. I thought the lid might open by some machine.

I walked home near midday. I tried to work, but my thoughts would not settle.

By afternoon, the scene had changed. News had reached London. Carriages and carts stood by the road. Many bicycles lay on the grass. People came in large numbers. It was very hot. The burnt heather gave off smoke. A boy sold apples and ginger beer.

Henderson and Ogilvy stood near the cylinder with a tall man from London. Workmen dug around it with tools. They tried to turn the lid but could not grip it.

I was asked to fetch Lord Hilton, the owner of the land, so that a fence could be built to keep the crowd back. I went home for tea and then walked to the station to meet him.

When I returned, the sun was low. The crowd was larger now. Voices were raised. A boy ran past me.

“It’s moving,” he said. “It’s screwing out.”

I pushed through the people. The lid had risen. A length of bright screw showed in the light.

Then, with a sudden ring of metal on stone, the lid fell away.

I looked into the dark opening. For a moment I saw nothing. Then I saw movement. Grey shapes, soft and thick, moved within. Two large round eyes shone in the shadow. Something like a grey arm, thin and long, lifted and waved.

A cold fear passed through me.

More of the creature rose into view. It was large, round, and glistening, like wet leather. Its mouth opened and closed. Thick tentacles moved around it.

The thing struggled to lift itself from the cylinder. It seemed heavy, as if the earth weighed upon it.

A woman screamed behind me.

The creature slipped and fell into the pit with a dull sound. Another shape appeared in the darkness behind it.

Terror took me. I turned and ran toward the trees, though I could not stop looking back. Around me, people cried out and fled.

That was my first sight of a living Martian.

I did not yet know how much death would follow.

I only knew that something not of this world had come among us, and that our old life had ended in that moment.

Part 2

I ran until my breath burned in my chest. I stopped among small pine trees and low bushes, turned, and looked back. The pit was hidden by the sand thrown up

when the cylinder fell, yet the crowd still stood at a distance in a wide circle. Some stared as if they were held by a spell. Others began to move away in fear. I could see dark shapes against the bright sky, and I felt very small and very alone.

Then I saw the head of the young shopman who had fallen into the pit. It rose for a moment above the edge. His face was dark against the light. He tried to climb, but slipped. For a second I thought I heard a faint cry. Then he was gone. I wanted to run back to help him, but my fear held me still.

We stood there, scattered over the common, like sheep that smell danger but do not yet understand it. No one spoke much. The sky behind the trees was deep blue, and the sun had almost set. Smoke rose from small fires in the grass. The world felt wrong.

After some minutes, I saw something move again in the pit. A long rod rose slowly into the air. At its end was a round disk that turned from side to side. It seemed to look over us. I did not know then that this was part of a terrible weapon.

The people near Woking formed a small group. Others stood toward Chobham. I walked in a wide curve, trying to find a place from which I could see into the pit without going too near. I was filled with two feelings at once: fear and a strange desire to see more.

A few men decided to go forward with a white flag. They believed the Martians were thinking beings. They hoped to show that we too could think and speak. I learned later that Ogilvy and Henderson were among them.

They moved slowly toward the pit. Others followed at a distance. The white cloth waved from side to side.

Suddenly, three puffs of greenish smoke rose from the pit. They shot straight up into the still air. The light of them was so bright that the sky seemed to darken around them. At the same time I heard a faint hissing sound.

The little group with the flag stopped. The green light touched their faces. For a moment they stood as if frozen.

Then came a low humming noise.

A dark shape rose from the pit. From it came a thin, pale beam, like a ghost of light. I did not understand what I was seeing. It seemed almost nothing.

Then the men with the flag burst into flame.

It happened so fast that my mind could not take it in. One moment they stood there; the next they were bright with fire. I saw them fall. I saw others turn and run. Bushes caught fire. Dry grass burned with dull flashes. Pine trees flared up like torches.

The beam moved in a smooth line, sweeping the ground. Wherever it touched, fire followed. It was silent except for the crackle of burning wood and a sudden cry from a horse.

I saw the dark line of fire coming toward me across the heather. It smoked and glowed. I could not move. I felt as if I were turned to stone.

The beam passed near me but did not strike me. It moved beyond, setting trees and fences alight. Then the humming stopped. The dark shape sank back into the pit.

The common fell quiet again.

Smoke drifted in the evening air. Flames rose from houses near Woking station. The sky above was deep and clear, and stars began to show.

The little group with the white flag was gone.

Then fear came upon me in full force.

I turned and ran. I ran without thinking of direction. I ran as a child runs from a nightmare. The dark bushes seemed alive. Every shadow felt like death behind me. I did not look back.

At last I reached the road near the canal bridge. I could go no farther. My legs failed me and I fell.

For some time I lay there. When I rose, my mind felt empty. The terror had left me suddenly, like a coat thrown aside. I was again a man of daily life. The gas lamps shone. A train passed with lighted windows. People stood talking at their gates.

It seemed impossible that such horror had happened only minutes before.

I asked a small group what news they had heard. They laughed lightly. They thought the story foolish. They had not seen the heat-ray. They had not seen men turn to flame.

I went home.

My wife was frightened when she saw my face. I told her all. The dinner lay untouched as I spoke. She grew pale and pressed her hand on mine.

“They may come here,” she said again and again.

I tried to comfort her. I told her the Martians moved slowly. I told her the weight of our world would hold them down. I repeated what I had heard about gravity and air. I believed that guns and shells would soon destroy them.

We spoke of poor Ogilvy. We imagined the soldiers already marching.

Later that night, as we sat together, we heard the sound of hammering from the direction of the common. The Martians were at work.

It was strange how life went on around us. People in Woking dined and talked. Some walked out in the warm evening to see the excitement. At the station trains came and went as usual. A boy sold papers and shouted, “Men from Mars!”

Few understood what had begun.

Near midnight, another bright star fell from the sky, toward the pine woods near Byfleet. It shone green as it dropped. That was the second cylinder.

On Saturday the air felt heavy and close. I had slept little. Early in the morning I went into the garden and listened. It was quiet. Only a lark sang.

The milkman told me troops had surrounded the pit. Guns were coming. I heard a train pass and felt a strange comfort in the normal sound.

My neighbor spoke calmly over the fence. He gave me strawberries from his garden. He said the insurance would suffer from the fires. He laughed.

I walked toward the common but was stopped by soldiers near the bridge. They would not let anyone pass. I told them what I had seen. They asked many questions. They spoke of digging trenches and rushing the creatures. They did not yet know the power of the heat-ray.

All morning there was waiting. No one could see the Martians clearly. Smoke rose from the pit. There was hammering, steady and hard.

In the afternoon, I went again for news. Guns were placed near Chobham. The pine woods where the second cylinder had fallen were shelled in hopes of destroying it before it opened.

Toward evening, as my wife and I took tea in the garden, a deep sound rolled across the air. Then came sharp firing.

Suddenly there was a violent crash. The trees near the Oriental College burst into red flame. The church tower beside it fell. Part of the college roof slid down as if struck by a giant hand.

A piece of our own chimney broke and fell into the garden.

I understood at once that the Martians could now reach beyond the hill. Their heat-ray had struck the buildings.

I seized my wife's arm and pulled her into the road. People were running from their houses. Hussars rode past at speed. Smoke turned the sunlight red.

"We cannot stay here," I said.

"Where can we go?" she asked.

I thought quickly of her cousins at Leatherhead.

"Leatherhead," I cried.

I ran to the inn called the Spotted Dog to hire a horse and cart. The landlord did not at first understand the danger. I gave him two pounds and promised to return the cart by midnight.

I drove back and placed my wife and our servant in the cart. Then I ran into the house to gather a few things of value.

As I packed, I heard the distant sound of firing and the crackle of flames.

Our quiet life had broken apart in a single day.

And this was only the beginning.

Part 3

I gathered what I could with shaking hands. I took some silver, a few small things that could be carried, and placed them in a bag. Even as I moved through the rooms, I felt a strange sense that I might never see them again. The table, the books, the chair by the window—each seemed already part of another life.

Outside, the air was filled with a dull red light. Smoke drifted low over the roofs. I could hear people shouting in the road. Once more there came the heavy

sound of a gun from far off, followed by a deeper, harsher note that I knew was the heat-ray at work.

I locked the door out of habit, though I do not know why. Then I ran down the path and climbed into the dog cart beside my wife. The servant sat at the back, pale and silent.

“Drive,” my wife whispered.

I struck the horse lightly, and we moved down the hill toward the main road. Other carts and carriages were already there. Some people carried bundles. Others ran on foot. There was no order, no clear plan. All wished only to go away from the common.

Behind us, above the trees, I saw a tall shape rise slowly into view.

It was not like the creatures I had seen in the pit. This was a machine. It stood high on three long metal legs. Its body was round and dark, and it moved with a strange smooth motion. As it stepped forward, the ground seemed to shake.

For a moment I forgot to breathe.

The machine paused on the edge of the hill. From its side a thin beam flashed. A house near the road burst into flame. The walls glowed and fell inward. People screamed.

“Do not look,” I said to my wife.

I turned the horse sharply down a side road. Others followed. The noise behind us grew louder. Another of the great machines appeared, rising like a giant from the smoke. Its legs moved with a steady, terrible grace.

The soldiers fired from somewhere near the trees. I heard the sharp reports of rifles. They sounded small and weak against the heavy sound of the Martian machine.

Then a shell burst near one of the machines. There was a flash and a cloud of smoke. For an instant I hoped the thing would fall. But it did not. It turned its beam toward the guns.

The place where the soldiers stood flared bright and was gone.

We drove on.

The road toward Leatherhead was crowded. People shouted to one another. A

woman cried for her child. A man tried to turn his cart but blocked the way. Horses reared in fear at the smell of smoke and the strange sounds behind us.

I did my best to keep calm. I spoke gently to the horse. I tried not to let my hands shake on the reins.

Once we reached a small rise in the road, I could not help looking back.

Three of the tall machines now stood upon the common. They moved slowly but with purpose. Flames spread in wide arcs before them. The sky behind was dark with smoke. The setting sun shone through it in a dull red glow.

I felt then not only fear, but also a deep sense of loss. The world I had known—its order, its safety—was broken.

We passed through small villages. In some, people had not yet heard the full news. They stood at doors, watching the line of carts and wondering. In others, panic had already begun. Shops were closed. Families hurried along the lanes.

At one point we were stopped by a group of soldiers. They asked where we were going. I told them toward Leatherhead. They urged us to hurry and not to block the road.

“The machines are moving south,” one said. His face was grey with fear.

The sun set fully. Darkness fell, broken by the glow of fires behind us. The road became harder to see. We moved more slowly now, as the crowd thickened.

At last, near midnight, we reached Leatherhead. My wife’s cousins received us in great alarm. They had heard distant sounds but did not yet know the truth.

We left the servant with them. I felt I must return to Woking. My mind was troubled. I could not rest knowing that my house and all I owned lay in danger.

My wife begged me not to go.

“It is madness,” she said. “You have seen what they can do.”

“I must know,” I answered. “I will come back before morning.”

I kissed her and set out again with the cart.

The road north was darker now. Many had fled in the other direction. I met fewer people. The sky glowed faintly above the horizon where Woking lay.

As I drew nearer, I heard distant booming. The ground trembled at times. Once I saw, far off, the dark outline of one of the machines against the sky. It moved

like a living tower.

Near Maybury I left the cart in a side lane and went on foot. The heat in the air was strong. Smoke stung my eyes.

My house stood silent. The windows were dark. For a moment I felt relief. Perhaps the machines had passed it by.

I entered quickly and gathered more of my papers and books. I worked by candlelight, listening always for the sound of the machines.

Then I heard a new sound.

It was not the hum of the heat-ray. It was not the boom of guns. It was a deep, slow rhythm, like a great engine at work.

I went to the window.

One of the machines was moving along the ridge near the college. It carried something in its metal arms. As it walked, it turned its body slowly, scanning the land.

I stood frozen.

Suddenly a bright light shone from it—not the heat-ray, but a white searchlight that swept across the fields. It passed over houses and trees. When it came near my house, I threw myself to the floor.

The beam moved on.

I waited, hardly daring to breathe.

The machine continued southward. I heard once more the boom of guns, farther away now. Then, after a time, silence returned.

I rose slowly.

My courage failed me then. I knew that I could not remain. At any moment the machine might return. I gathered what I had packed and left the house.

As I walked down the road toward where I had hidden the cart, I looked once more at my home. It stood quiet under the faint light of the stars.

I did not know that I would never live there again.

I reached the cart and turned the horse back toward Leatherhead. My mind was full of confused thoughts. I tried to understand what these beings wanted. They did not speak. They did not try to bargain. They only destroyed.

Before dawn I returned to my wife. She had not slept. When she saw me safe, she wept with relief.

Outside, the world waited in fear.

And still the Martians were building, advancing, and preparing for war.

Part 4

Morning came grey and heavy. A low mist lay over the fields near Leatherhead, and the air felt thick, as if the world itself were holding its breath. We had eaten little and slept less. My wife moved about the house in silence, listening for sounds from the north. I stood at the window and watched the road.

Now and then small groups of people passed. Some had carts piled high with goods. Others carried only small bags. A few walked as if in a dream, their faces empty. They spoke of Woking in broken sentences. They spoke of fire. They spoke of tall machines walking over houses.

About nine o'clock, distant booming reached us. It rolled across the fields like slow thunder. I knew it was the guns. The army had gathered its strength. I tried to feel hope. Surely the soldiers would bring heavier guns. Surely no machine, no matter how strange, could stand against the full force of our army.

Yet even as I thought this, I remembered the thin white beam and the men who had burst into flame.

News came in pieces. A man on horseback shouted that more cylinders had fallen in the night. One near Addlestone. Another near the river. The Martians were not alone now. They were increasing in number.

The thought chilled me more than the morning air.

By noon the sky had cleared. From a rise near the house I could see faint smoke far away, rising in dark columns. The road grew more crowded. There was less order now. Some argued about which way was safest. Some spoke of London as a place of refuge. Others feared that the Martians would move there next.

Around midday a group of soldiers marched through Leatherhead. Their faces were set and serious. They carried heavy guns drawn by horses. One officer

stopped to speak with a man at the gate.

“The line is being formed along the Wey,” he said. “We will stop them there.”

His voice was firm, but his eyes showed strain.

In the afternoon the sound of battle grew louder. It was not constant, but came in waves. Boom—pause—boom. Once, a long deep roar shook the ground. Some said a bridge had been blown up to slow the machines.

I walked again to the rise and watched. The smoke columns were thicker now. At times I thought I saw movement far off—dark shapes against the haze. But distance and heat made the air unsteady.

Toward evening the sky to the north turned red.

The glow spread wide, and even the clouds above caught the color. It was not sunset. It was the burning of towns and fields.

My wife stood beside me and gripped my arm.

“They are coming,” she said softly.

As darkness fell, more people passed through Leatherhead. They spoke of the Martian machines crossing the river. They spoke of guns destroyed. They spoke of soldiers cut down in moments by the heat-ray.

One man said he had seen a machine struck by a shell and fall. But he did not know if it had been destroyed. Hope rose in me for a moment. Then another voice said that two more machines had risen behind it.

Fear and hope moved back and forth in my mind like waves.

Late that night, we heard a new sound.

It was faint at first. A slow metallic rhythm. Step—pause—step. The ground seemed to feel it before the ear did.

People in the house grew still. Someone whispered a prayer.

The sound passed at a distance, moving east. We did not see the machine, but we knew it was there, somewhere in the darkness beyond the trees.

The army line had failed.

By morning the road was full. Carts jammed wheel to wheel. Horses struggled. Children cried. The order of village life had broken apart. Shops were closed. Doors stood open.

I knew we could not remain.

“We must go farther,” I told my wife. “South, perhaps to the coast.”

She nodded. She no longer argued. The events of the last two days had changed her. They had changed us both.

We packed again, this time with little thought of what we left behind. Only what we could carry. Food, water, a few clothes.

When we stepped into the road, we became part of the great movement. The road south was a river of people. Some pushed forward with force. Others were too tired and moved slowly. There was no clear leader. No one seemed to know where safety lay.

As we moved, rumors flowed like the crowd itself. London was in panic. The government had called out all forces. The navy was preparing. Bridges were blocked. Trains were full.

The sun rose higher. The heat grew strong. Dust filled the air from the wheels and hooves. It stung the eyes and throat.

Then, around midday, a cry rose from the back of the crowd.

“They are coming!”

Panic moved faster than any machine. People shoved and stumbled. A cart overturned. A child fell and was nearly trampled. I held my wife close and forced our way toward the side of the road.

I climbed a low bank and looked back.

Far in the distance, above the haze, I saw the tops of the Martian machines.

They walked steadily, not rushing, not slowing. They seemed almost calm. Behind them, smoke trailed across the sky.

The crowd broke apart in wild fear.

Some left the road and ran across fields. Others tried to turn back, only to meet those still pushing forward. The sound of weeping and shouting filled the air.

Then, from somewhere to the east, came the boom of heavy guns.

The Martians paused.

For a moment the machines stood still against the sky.

A shell burst near one. Smoke rose. The machine swayed.

My heart leapt.

But then a thin white beam flashed.

The place where the guns had stood became a mass of fire.

The machines moved again.

I felt then the full weight of our weakness. Our courage, our weapons, our numbers—none seemed enough.

Yet still we moved. Still we hoped that somewhere, somehow, a line would hold.

The road south stretched before us, long and uncertain.

And behind us, step by step, the Martians advanced.

Part 5

The panic on the road did not last in one sharp burst. It rose and fell like a storm wind. When the machines seemed far, people slowed. When someone shouted that they were near, the crowd broke again into wild motion. It was fear without rest.

My wife walked beside me now, for the road had grown too crowded for any cart to pass. We had left the dog cart behind when the crush became too great. I still carried the small bag of silver and papers. It felt heavier with each mile.

The heat of the day was hard to bear. Dust rose in thick clouds and clung to our clothes and faces. Children cried for water. Some sat down by the roadside and would not rise again.

About mid-afternoon we reached a small village. Its people had already fled. Doors stood open. A loaf of bread lay on a table inside one house, untouched. In another yard a dog barked at us, tied and forgotten.

We did not stay. A man ran past us shouting that the Martians had turned west toward the river. Others said they had divided, that some were moving toward London.

London.

The word passed from mouth to mouth like a warning bell.

By evening we saw smoke rising in many directions. The sky seemed too large and too empty above the broken land. Now and then we heard distant booming,

but less often than before. The guns were falling silent.

We found shelter that night in a small farmhouse. The farmer had gone. His wife and daughters had left food on the table as if they had meant to return in a few hours. We ate what we could and lay down on the floor.

My wife slept from pure exhaustion. I lay awake.

I thought of the Martians in their machines. I tried to understand them. They did not speak. They did not shout. They did not seem to hate. They acted with a calm purpose. They moved, destroyed, and moved again.

Toward midnight I stepped outside.

The sky was clear. Stars shone bright and cold. For a moment, I felt the vastness of space above me. Somewhere among those stars lay Mars, the red world that had sent these beings.

I felt very small.

The next morning we rose early and continued south. The road was still full, but the crowd had thinned. Some had turned east or west in hope of finding clearer paths.

We met a man who said that the Martians had released a black smoke near one town. He said it rolled like a cloud along the ground and killed all who breathed it.

I did not believe him at first. It seemed too terrible. Yet his face was pale and firm.

“It moves low,” he said. “It sinks into houses. It fills the streets.”

Later that day we saw it.

In the distance, beyond a line of trees, a dark mass lay close to the earth. It did not rise like ordinary smoke. It crept. The wind pushed it slowly, and as it moved, the land behind it seemed empty and still.

People ahead of us turned and ran. Some covered their mouths with cloth. A cart drove wildly across a field, the horse near to breaking.

The black cloud rolled on.

We changed direction at once, moving west along a narrow lane. I felt a sharp pain in my chest from fear. The black smoke was another weapon, quiet and wide.

Against such things, what could men do?

By afternoon we reached a small town near the river. Boats crowded the banks. People argued over places. Some tried to cross by bridge, but soldiers held the way.

“The bridge will be blown,” one said. “We must slow them.”

The air was thick with fear and sweat. Horses screamed as they were forced onto boats. A child fell into the water and was pulled out by a stranger.

Suddenly there was a great boom behind us.

The ground shook.

We turned.

Over the trees we saw one of the tall machines. It had come faster than we thought. It stepped across a field and paused near the riverbank.

For a moment all was still.

Then, from the river, a ship moved forward.

It was a warship, low and dark. Steam rose from it. I later learned its name, but at that time I knew only that it was one of ours.

The ship fired.

A shell burst against the side of the Martian machine. Metal flashed. Smoke covered the shape.

The crowd shouted.

The machine swayed.

Again the ship fired.

This time the shell struck near the body. The machine tilted, one leg lifting high. Then, slowly, it fell into the water with a great splash.

A cry of wild hope rose from the people on the bank.

The ship moved closer, firing again.

But from farther upstream came another machine.

Its beam flashed across the river.

The warship burst into flame.

Steam and fire rose together. The ship listed and began to sink.

The hope that had filled the crowd broke like glass.

I pulled my wife away from the bank.

“We must go,” I said.

Behind us the black smoke drifted closer.

We ran along the river path, away from the burning ship, away from the fallen machine.

Night fell again.

We found shelter in a small boat shed. The river smelled of smoke and oil. Ash drifted down like dark snow.

My wife lay with her head against my shoulder.

“Will this end?” she asked.

I did not answer at once.

At last I said, “It must.”

Yet in my heart, I did not know how.

The Martians had crossed fields, towns, rivers. They had faced guns and ships and moved on.

And still, step by step, they advanced across our world.

Part 6

We did not remain long by the river. Before dawn, the air grew thick again, and we feared the black smoke might drift toward us. So we left the boat shed and followed a narrow road that led away from the water and toward open country.

The world felt broken.

Fences lay smashed where carts had forced their way through. Fields were trampled flat. Here and there stood abandoned wagons, their wheels turned at strange angles, as if they had died where they stopped. In one place a horse lay on its side, still in its harness. I turned my wife’s face away.

As the sun rose, we heard no guns.

That silence frightened me more than the noise of battle.

We walked for hours. Sometimes we met small groups moving in the same direction. Sometimes we saw no one at all. Once, in the distance, I thought I saw

the top of a Martian machine beyond a line of trees, but it did not move toward us.

Around midday we came upon a man sitting by the roadside.

He wore the black clothes of a priest. His hair was disordered, and his face pale. He stared at the ground as if he did not see us.

When we spoke to him, he lifted his eyes slowly.

“It is the end,” he said in a low voice. “The judgment.”

He had been in a village that the Martians had entered. He spoke in broken phrases of houses crushed under metal feet, of people running and falling, of the black smoke filling the church.

My wife listened in horror.

I felt anger rise within me—not only at the Martians, but at this man’s hopelessness.

“We must move,” I said firmly. “Sitting here will not save us.”

He rose at last and walked with us.

By afternoon we reached a place where the land dipped into a hollow. There stood a ruined house, half broken by some force. One wall had fallen. The roof sagged. Smoke stains marked the stones.

We entered, thinking to rest.

It was there that our fate changed again.

As we moved inside, a deep sound rolled across the land.

We looked at one another.

The priest whispered, “They are near.”

I went to the broken wall and looked out.

A Martian machine stood not far away, beyond the hollow. It was partly hidden by the rise of the ground, but I could see two of its long legs and the lower part of its body.

It was still.

Beside it lay a large metal object—another cylinder, I thought, newly opened.

I pulled back at once.

“We must stay quiet,” I said.

We crouched in the lower part of the ruined house. My wife trembled, but she made no sound.

For a long time there was only the faint clank of metal and a distant humming. Then came a new terror.

The Martians began to handle something within the hollow beyond the rise. A thin stream of black smoke rose and then sank, rolling low over the land.

It moved slowly toward us.

The hollow protected us for the moment. The smoke slid along the higher ground and drifted past. I watched through a crack in the wall as it flowed like a dark tide.

The priest began to mutter prayers.

“Be silent,” I hissed.

He fell quiet for a time, but his breathing was loud and uneven.

We could not leave. The machine stood too near. If we tried to run, we would be seen.

So we remained.

The day passed slowly. Hunger and thirst grew. The heat inside the broken house was strong, and the smell of smoke lay in the air.

Once the machine moved.

Its long legs stepped closer. The ground trembled. Dust fell from the ceiling.

I pressed my wife’s hand.

The machine paused almost above us.

I could see part of its body through the crack—dark metal, streaked with ash.

Then a long metal arm reached down and lifted something from the ground. I dared not think what it might be.

After a time that felt like hours, the machine moved away again.

Night came.

We did not sleep.

The priest whispered of the end of the world. He said that men had grown proud and wicked. He said that this was punishment.

My wife wept softly.

I felt anger and fear mix within me.

“If we are to die,” I said quietly, “let us at least die as men, not as frightened animals.”

But in truth, I felt as frightened as any.

The next day we remained trapped.

We dared not leave. The machine did not move far. At times we heard hammering. At times a strange mechanical rhythm.

The Martians were building again.

Food ran low. Water ran lower.

By the third day the priest began to lose control. He spoke loudly. He prayed aloud. He wept.

“You will bring them upon us,” I warned him.

He did not listen.

I knew that if he cried out at the wrong moment, we would all die.

The fear of the Martians was no longer the only fear.

There was fear within our own hiding place.

Outside, the machines walked our land.

Inside, hunger and madness crept closer.

Part 7

The third day in the ruined house was the worst.

The priest’s fear turned into wild speech. At first he whispered prayers. Then he began to speak in a louder voice, as if arguing with someone who was not there. He spoke of sin, of fire, of the end of all things.

I tried to quiet him.

“They will hear you,” I said.

He shook his head. His eyes were bright and strange.

“It does not matter,” he replied. “We are in the hands of God.”

“We are in the hands of the Martians,” I said sharply.

My wife pressed my arm, begging me not to anger him. But I saw that if he lost

control, we would all be lost.

Outside, the machine still moved now and then. Once we heard the deep hum of the heat-ray. The ground shook, and dust fell from the broken ceiling. Through a crack in the wall I saw one of the machines lifting a large metal frame, piece by piece, as if building something new.

The Martians were not resting. They were working with calm purpose.

Hunger gnawed at us. We had little left—some dry bread and a small bottle of water. I divided it carefully. The priest began to complain.

“Is this all?” he asked in a trembling voice.

“It must be enough,” I answered.

That night he began to sob aloud.

I placed my hand over his mouth.

“You must be silent,” I whispered.

He struggled weakly. His fear had become like fever.

By the fourth day he could no longer bear it. He stood suddenly and cried out.

“We cannot hide! We must go to them! It is the will of God!”

His voice rang through the hollow.

My blood ran cold.

I seized him and pulled him down, but he fought me. He tried to rise again.

“Be still!” I said through my teeth.

He struggled and called out once more.

In that moment I knew what must be done.

I struck him.

He fell, stunned. I held him down until he lay quiet. My wife stared at me in horror, but she understood.

For a long time we listened.

Outside there was no change at first.

Then I heard a sound that froze my heart—a slow, heavy step.

The machine was moving toward us.

I crept to the crack and looked out.

The great metal leg came into view. It stepped down not far from the broken

wall. The ground trembled. A long arm descended, feeling across the ground like a blind hand.

It touched the fallen stones near the house.

I held my breath.

The arm moved closer.

Then, suddenly, it withdrew.

The machine turned away.

I sank back, weak with relief.

But the priest lay still.

When I bent over him, I saw that he did not move. Whether my blow had killed him or whether fear had broken his heart, I do not know. I felt a heavy weight of guilt, yet I knew that had he continued to cry out, we all would have died.

We buried him in the earth beneath the broken floor as best we could.

My wife wept quietly.

The days that followed blurred together. The machine remained near. The Martians seemed to have made the hollow a place of work. I saw through the crack that they brought more cylinders and pieces of metal. They built structures—tall frames of shining material.

Once I saw something else.

A Martian stood outside its machine.

It moved slowly, awkwardly, as if the earth pressed heavily upon it. Its body was round and soft, its skin dark and wet-looking. Long tentacles reached from its face and body.

It bent over something on the ground.

I realized with horror that it was feeding.

The sight turned my stomach.

I drew back and told my wife nothing of what I had seen.

Hunger grew worse. Water was almost gone. We knew we could not remain much longer.

On the fifth night, heavy rain began.

It fell steadily, washing the air clean of smoke. The ground turned to mud. I

heard less movement outside. The hum of machines was faint.

At dawn, I looked out.

The hollow was empty.

The great machine was gone.

Only the metal frames and the dark marks of smoke remained.

I waited long before daring to move. When at last I stepped outside, the air felt strange and fresh after so many days in hiding.

The land around us was changed. Trees were blackened. Grass lay flat and dead in places. Here and there stood tall metal structures like strange plants.

In the distance I saw red growth spreading across the ground—some new plant brought by the Martians, thick and fast-growing.

My wife and I stood in silence.

“They have moved on,” she said softly.

“Yes,” I replied. “Toward London.”

We knew then that we must go as well.

The world we stepped into was not the one we had known.

The fields were silent. No birds sang.

The Martians had not only broken our towns.

They had begun to change the earth itself.

Part 8

We walked north.

It may seem strange that we moved toward London rather than away from it. But the Martians had gone in that direction, and in my mind I felt a strong need to see what had become of the great city. I also hoped to find news—perhaps even safety—among the many streets and houses.

The land through which we passed was empty.

Now and then we saw a dead horse or the broken shell of a cart. In one place we found a house standing open, its door swinging in the wind. Inside, plates still lay upon a table. Dust had settled upon them. No voices answered when we called.

A red weed had begun to grow along the ditches and beside the streams. It clung to stones and fences, thick and wet. It spread fast, as if eager to claim the earth.

By midday we saw London in the distance.

But it was not the London I had known.

A dark haze hung over it. Smoke rose in slow spirals. The great shape of the city seemed quiet, too quiet for such a place.

As we drew nearer, we met no crowds, no soldiers, no carts. The road was nearly empty.

At last we entered the outer streets.

Shops stood open. Some windows were broken. In one place, goods lay scattered across the road, as if dropped in haste. A hat rolled slowly in the wind.

I called out once, but my voice echoed back at me.

London was silent.

We moved carefully, listening for the sound of machines. But there was none.

In the heart of the city we saw them.

Three great Martian machines stood in a square. They did not move.

At first I feared they were waiting.

But as we watched from the shadow of a doorway, we saw something strange.

One machine leaned slightly to one side.

Another stood still as stone.

No hum came from them.

No beam of light flashed.

We waited a long time.

Then, slowly, we stepped closer.

The nearest machine stood tall, but its metal looked dull. There was no movement inside.

A bird flew past and landed upon one of its long legs.

It did not move.

A strange thought came to me.

I stepped nearer still.

The metal body was open in one place. Inside, I saw a dark shape.

It was a Martian.
It lay still.
Its skin looked dry. Its tentacles hung without life.
I did not understand.
I turned to the others.
In each machine I saw the same.
The Martians were dead.
My heart beat fast, not from fear now, but from sudden, sharp hope.
We searched further.
In other streets we found more machines, some fallen, some standing. In each was the same sight—lifeless forms.
There were no signs of battle here. No fresh marks of shells.
They had not been killed by guns.
As we walked, I saw something else.
The red weed lay thick in the streets, but it too looked weak and fading. Its color had dulled.
A man appeared at last from a doorway.
He looked thin and wild.
“They are dead,” he said in a hoarse voice. “All of them.”
“How?” I asked.
He shook his head.
“Some sickness,” he said. “They could not live in our air. The small things—”
He coughed and gestured helplessly.
Then I understood.
The Martians had come from another world. Their bodies were not made for our air, our water, our tiny living creatures.
The smallest life on earth—the invisible forms that fill our blood and soil—had struck them down.
They had conquered our guns, our ships, our cities.
But they had not conquered the unseen.
We walked through London as if in a dream.

Here and there we found other people emerging from hiding. Some wept with relief. Some laughed wildly. Some simply sat and stared.

The great city slowly began to breathe again.

Smoke drifted away.

The sky above was clear.

The tall machines stood like silent monuments.

I felt a deep mix of joy and sorrow.

Joy that we lived.

Sorrow for those who had died—Ogilvy, Henderson, the soldiers, the countless nameless people who had burned or choked in the black smoke.

The Martians had fallen not by our strength, but by the quiet power of our world itself.

That night, for the first time in many days, I slept without fear of the sound of heavy steps in the dark.

The war of the worlds had ended.

Yet the memory of those days has never left me.

Even now, when I look at Mars shining red in the night sky, I do not see only a distant star.

I see the tall machines striding across our fields.

I see the white beam of heat.

And I remember how close our world came to silence.