Revision quiz

War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells

Book one (Chapters 1-10)

1. What have we learned about our narrator in the first part of this book?
   Consider his scientific knowledge, his background (including social class and lifestyle), his nature, his attitude towards the martians, his attitude towards other people.

2. What have we learned about the martians?
   Consider their nature, their reasons for entering earth, their communication with each other, their attitudes towards humans, their mechanical tools.

3. Why might Wells have introduced the martians one cylinder at a time, and then have them appear gradually from their cylinders?

4. How does Wells draw parallels between the martians’ attack on earth and the Empire’s attack on weaker societies (e.g. the Tasmanians). Why does he draw these parallels? What does this make us feel towards the martians? What do we realise about humans?

5. In what ways does Wells create verisimilitude in the plot by having martians land from outer space?
   Consider how he refers to recent scientific discoveries about Mars - be specific! Name the scientists and their discoveries. Also, the way he works with contemporary beliefs about outer space and Mars - again, the more specific you can be, the better. Practise making specific links between scientific points made in the text and actual scientific knowledge at the time of writing.

6. Select a quotation in which Wells attacks Britain’s complacency. Why does he do this?
   Consider the fact that Queen Victoria had been on the throne for sixty years at the time the novel was serialised, the fact that there hadn’t been a major war in decades, and the British Empire was secure.

7. Where is the novel set and what is the significance of this setting?
   Consider verisimilitude, suburbia and the access to the countryside which gets disrupted.

8. How are the armed forces presented so far?
   Consider their use of weaponry and people’s belief in their success.

Book one (Chapters 11-17)

1. How does Wells present the theme of communication in War of the Worlds?
   Comment on the humans’ desire to communicate with the martians and the martians’ responses. How does he present the spread of the news about the martians?

2. Analyse the presentation of the martians. (AO2)
   Explore their origins, physical appearance and emotional behaviour.
3. Explain in a paragraph, making reference to the context, how the martians can be interpreted as representing Wells’ fears for growing industrialisation? (AO2 and AO3)

Look carefully at the way they look/move/behave (especially focusing on their mechanical movements), their technology and their responses to the countryside.

4. Explain in a paragraph how the martians can be seen to embody contemporary fears about invasion (AO3) and Wells’ concerns about imperialism.

   Mention The Battle of Dorking, fears about the growing strength of Germany, the state of the Empire and sympathy for the oppressed.

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Book two (Chapters 1-9)

1. What is the function of the Curate in this novel?

   Consider his religious beliefs and what Wells may be criticising about them, his response to the invasion and what we learn about our narrator through their interaction.

2. What is the significance of the ‘red weed’ in these final chapters?

   Consider its colour, what it symbolises about the martians’ invasion, how it responds to bacteria and why this is significant.

3. What is the significance of the Artilleryman in these chapters?

   Consider his dystopian vision of society under martian domination, his view of the ‘weak’ members of society, which is related to eugenics, the discrepancy between his ambitious plans for survival and his actual methods.

4. What kind of city has London become by the end of the novel? What makes this space so sinister and gothic?

   Note the dead, charred bodies, the atmosphere of despair and the sense of impending attack.

5. Why does the narrator want to complete suicide by walking up to a martian?

6. What is the effect of the refrain ‘ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla’ in the final chapters?

   Remember that this isn’t an English word. How does this call affect the narrator?

7. What is Wells’ point about the fact bacteria attacks the martians but not the humans? What is he saying about the effects of struggling for survival?

8. Why does Wells include the idea that our narrator suffers from post-traumatic shock?

   Consider verisimilitude, to reflect how quickly the invasion happened and how long-lasting the traumatic after-effects are.
9. What is the significance of this moment in the text: ‘it was a paper on the probable development of Moral ideas with the development of the civilising process; and the last sentence was the opening of a prophecy: ‘In about two hundred years,’ I had written, ‘we may expect -’ The sentence ended abruptly.’

Consider how far our narrator’s perspective has changed since the beginning of the novel; how he began with a confident sense of what to expect from the world.

10. What is the effect of including the tender reunion of husband and wife?

Look at how it works in line with the rebuilding of the city, and the regeneration of society to create a positive ending.

Epilogue

1. What is the significance of the narrator alluding to the fact that many questions are left unanswered and that there are aspects of the martians’ technology that scientists don’t understand?

2. Find two or three quotations which suggest that the narrator is no longer complacent and, in fact, has developed new survivalist tendencies.

3. How has the narrator (and, implicitly, the rest of England) changed in his view of earth and its place in the universe?

4. What are some of the benefits of having been invaded?

5. Why does Wells conclude the novel with the narrator’s gothic nightmare and the final reflection on the wonder of being with his wife? What is the effect of ending the novel with this chapter, and not the previous one, which presented the miraculous reunion with his wife? Consider the traumatic experiences of the narrator, the way in which the epilogue leaves the reader unsettled, which contrasts to the ‘neat’ happy ending of the previous chapter.