‘Never before in the history of the world had such a mass of human beings moved and suffered together. The legendary hosts of Goths and Huns, the hugest armies Asia has ever seen, would have been but a drop in that current. And this was no disciplined march; it was a stampede—a stampede gigantic and terrible—without order and without a goal, six million people unarmed and un provisioned, driving headlong. It was the beginning of the rout of civilisation, of the massacre of mankind.’ H. G. Wells. War of the Worlds. London: William Heinemann, 1898, pp. 55-56

Reading Pack: ‘Invasion Fiction’

Hosts: Andrew King, Beth Gaskell and Ailise Bulfin

Wednesday 4th July 2.00-3.00pm Senate House (Court)
no 16, April 1897, Illustrated by Warwick Goble.


Cover Illustration [George T. Chesney], The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer
‘To Arms!’: Invasion Narratives and Late-Victorian Literature

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Abstract
This article introduces readers to the fiction of invasion, a paranoid literary phenomenon that responded to widespread social concerns about the possible invasion of Britain by an array of hostile foreign forces in the period between 1870 and 1914. It begins with an overview of the development of this relatively un-known body of work in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, charting assumptions of imminent large-scale war, fascination with the technology of warfare and the marked participation of military men who used the fiction to agitate for increased defence spending. While this alarmist brand of popular fiction provoked considerable contemporary commentary, modern critical engagement with it has been somewhat limited. Beginning in the 1960s and dominated by the work of the master bibliographer I. F. Clarke, the initial scholarly response necessarily took the form of classification and survey and evinced particular interest in adjudging the accuracy of fictional predictions about future war. More recent scholarship is concerned with reading the fiction in the context of its own times, probing its relationship with external imperial factors and internal domestic concerns and its effectiveness as a propaganda tool. In addition to offering an overview of this line of enquiry, this article seeks to broaden the understanding of the invasion narrative in fin-de-siècle popular fiction, drawing lines out to the recurrence of the invasion theme across a broad range of genres and modes exceeding that of future war fiction and including so-called 'yellow peril' narratives, crime and detective fiction and the gothic. In conclusion, a number of avenues complementing the textual and the historical are suggested for future exploration.

Defining the Invasion Tale: ‘This Forecast of the Coming War’

The defences of London had been broken. The track of the invaders was marked by ruined homes and heaps of corpses, and London’s millions knew on this eventful night that the enemy were now actually at their doors. … The people were in a mad frenzy of excitement, and the scenes everywhere were terrible. Women wept and wailed, men uttered words of blank despair, and children screamed at an unknown terror.


In 1909, P. G. Wodehouse penned a comic novella The Swoop! which saw Britain saved from simultaneous invasion by nine foreign armies through the endeavours of a boy scout named Clarence Chugwater. Wodehouse’s ludicrous plot, which featured invading armies not just from Britain’s imperial rivals like Germany and Russia, but also from unlikely nations like Switzerland, Monaco, Morocco and Somaliland, was a satirical take on an alarmist body of popular fiction that burgeoned in the period between 1870 and the beginning of World War I as imperial rivalries heightened and international relations deteriorated globally. Running as a paranoid under-current to the brash and widespread confidence of jingoism in the late-Victorian period were intensifying concerns that continual imperial expansion could entail not only fortune and glory for the colonising nation, but also serious drawbacks. Among these latter was the fear that Britain, the small-island centre of the world’s then-largest empire, might
imminently find itself facing an invasion attempt by any one of its resentful European ‘great power’ rivals or even by rebellious colonial subjects. To borrow historian Barbara Tuchman’s diagnosis, in Britain by the early 1900s, ‘the idea of invasion became almost a psychosis’ (380). Or as the contemporary writer M. P. Shiel put it in The Yellow Danger, his lurid 1898 tale of a Sino-Japanese attack on Europe, “Invasion” was the word which more frequently than any other rose to the lips of Englishmen’ (40).

Not surprisingly, one of the key outlets for the expression of anxiety about invasion was the murky medium of popular fiction, and between 1870 and 1914 popular authors, many of whom had strong colonial connections, had produced a cycle of texts which represented directly or indirectly the overthrow of British society by hostile foreign intruders. The admonitory and often hysterical tone of most of this body of work, in stark contrast to Wodehouse’s levity, is amply reflected in the opening quotation from a very popular work by one of the genre’s major exponents, William Le Queux. This ‘forecast of the Coming War’, as Le Queux deemed it, was The Great War in England in 1897 (1894), in which England was invaded by a vast and bloodthirsty joint force of Russian and French troops. The quotation describes the aftermath of its devastating march on London, while the image in Fig. 1 shows the subsequent

Fig. 1. ‘Bombardment of London: “In Ludgate Hill the scene was awful.” ’ Frontispiece, The Great War in London in 1897 (London: Tower, 1894). Reproduced with the permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin.
prolonged bombardment under which 'London, the all-powerful metropolis, which had
egotistically considered herself the impregnable Citadel of the World, fell to pieces and
was consumed' (292). Shiel’s and Le Queux’s sensational outpourings are just two in a
much wider body of work, but despite the proliferation of the invasion theme in late-
Victorian fiction, it has remained relatively unexplored in academic criticism as this article
will discuss. As it is a some-what unknown area, I will start by briefly outlining the
development of the invasion narrative in the late-Victorian period.

To a certain extent, the turn of the century cycle of invasion fiction had its roots in the Franco-
Prussian War of 1870–1, a brief but significant European conflict. The speed and decisiveness
of Germany’s unexpected victory over France made a powerful impact not just on the countries
involved, but on all the European imperial powers, especially Britain. While the threat to Britain of
hostility with France receded, the menace of German militarism loomed as the obvious advantages
of its modern techniques and technology of warfare were displayed (Otte 71–5). As George Bernard
Shaw retrospectively put it: ‘Suddenly Germany beat France right down into the dust, by the exercise
of an organised efficiency in war of which nobody up to then had any conception. There was not a
State in Europe that did not say to itself: “Good Heavens! what would happen if she attacked us?”’
(13). With this fear and what he considered the comparably limited state of the British armed forces
in mind, within months of the war’s end then Lieutenant-Colonel George Tomkyns Chesney penned
a short fictional work, The Battle of Dorking (1871), to warn Britain of its vulnerability. In it he
posited the German invasion and conquest of Britain based on Germany’s superior military
technology. Chesney’s text caused an immediate uproar, helping to start a public campaign for
military ‘preparedness’ – one diplomat, for example, warning in 1871 that unless Bismarck continued to restrain
Prussia, Britain could soon face ‘the “Battle of Dorking”, which in my private belief would
take place just as described [by Chesney] and be as ruinous as that of Hastings!’ (qtd. in
Otte 73). At the same time in the literary sphere, Chesney’s text achieved ‘the almost unique
feat of starting off a literary tradition single-handed’, as science fiction critic Brian Stableford has put it (30).

This tradition is what I. F. Clarke, its pioneering literary critic, terms future war fiction: a
proto-science-fictional body of work which explored the possible consequences of develop-
ments in military technology and international diplomacy. Invasion was a key theme in this
tradition and from the publication of The Battle of Dorking in the 1870s on, Clarke describes
how ‘the new era of the highly motivated short story had begun’, replacing the factual tract or
pamphlet as the principle popular means to disseminate invasion concerns (Clarke, ‘Before and
After’). The 1880s saw the addition of a number of notable longer works to the admonitory
tradition, including several that dramatised the negative side of the 1882 debate on developing
an English Channel tunnel linking Britain and France. By the 1890s, as international relations
deteriorated and changes in the literary marketplace led to an increased demand for sensational,
topical serial and one-volume novels, the invasion tale had gained major momentum. It thrived
in the Edwardian period and up until 1914 with popular authors proffering endless versions of
invasion and global conflict to a readership increasingly convinced that major war was
imminent, as the introduction to one of the first major serial novels of the 1890s, The Great War
of 1892 (1891), amply demonstrates:

The air is full of rumours of War. The European nations stand fully armed and prepared for instant
mobilization. Authorities are agreed that a GREAT WAR must break out in the immediate future
… the coming conflict will be the bloodiest in history, and must involve the most momentous
consequences to the whole world. At any time the incident may occur which will precipitate the
disaster. (Colomb et al. 1)
Subsequent notable examples of invasion narratives of the future-war type that Clarke documents include Le Queux’s hugely popular follow-up The Invasion of 1910 (1906); George Griffith’s The Angel of the Revolution (1893); Louis Tracy’s The Final War (1896) and The Invaders (1901); and H. G. Wells’s seminal The War of the Worlds (1898) and The War in the Air (1908).

Typically, the invasion narrative, with the exception of the somewhat differently motivated Wells’s texts, turned upon the initially disastrous but ultimately routed military invasion of Britain by the villainous forces of whichever European power or combination of powers seemed most hostile to Britain at the time of writing. In the 1870s after the Franco-Prussian War, this tended to be Germany, with France and Russia gaining precedence in the 1890s, before a firm swing back to Germany in the early 20th century, mirroring trends in shifting international relationships. The 1890s also saw increasing predictions that great power alliances could spark war on a world-wide scale and speculation about the effects on outcomes of futuristic technology such as airships and submarines. This latter vein of speculation is aptly captured in Fig. 2, in which Fred T. Jane has dramatically illustrated Griffith’s conviction, emplotted in The Angel of the Revolution, that the possession of navigable aircraft would be decisive in future conflicts.

Another major feature of this body of writing was the participation of military men, who, from Chesney on, used it to champion their favoured schemes for achieving military preparedness, whether via conscription, fortification or naval aggrandisement. The Great War of 1892, for example, had been commissioned by the editor of Black and White magazine from Rear-Admiral Philip Colomb and a team of collaborating military and naval experts who used the fiction to describe as accurately as they could how the expected war might unfold and to promote increased defence spending (Clarke, The Great War with Germany 29–31, 424). And, many of the civilian writers claimed to have been guided by military expertise. The book edition of Le Queux’s sensational The Invasion of 1910, which sold an estimated million copies (Ashley 23), is constructed as an extended argument for ‘universal military training’ on the lines advocated by the celebrated hero of the Second Boer War.
Field-Marshal Lord Roberts. It even boasted an introductory facsimile letter from Roberts set into the binding and warning (see Fig. 3):

> The catastrophe that may happen if we still remain in our present state of unpreparedness is visibly and forcibly illustrated in Mr. Le Queux's new book which I recommend to the perusal of everyone who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart.²

So familiar was this kind of opening gambit that it made an obvious target for Wodehouse, The Swoop! including a mock admonitory preface which gave as the author's address 'The Bomb-Proof Shelter, London', while its boy scout protagonist despair in the first chapter that not a single member of his family would gainfully spend their Sunday afternoon leisure in 'practising with the rifle, or drilling, or learning to make bandages' (12). Another late and notable intervention in the genre was that of 'Saki' (H. H. Munro) who employed biting social satire, not to humorous effect as per Wodehouse’s lampoon, but rather to make the case for preparedness in a chilling, understated fashion with his 1913 account of fashionable London's acquiescence to Hohenzollern occupation, When William Came. With the actual advent of war, the invasion tale in its fin-de-siècle form lost relevance and ceased to be a noticeable publishing phenomenon in Britain after 1914, though its tropes continued to inform paranoid spy and science fiction writing and subsequent 20th-century waves of invasion tales.

Fig. 3. Open letter from Lord Roberts, 24 Nov 1905, bound into the preface of William Le Queux, The Invasion of 1910 (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1906). Reproduced with the permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin.
Cover Illustration, [George T. Chesney], *The Battle of Dorking* (London: Grant Richards, 1914); First World War recruitment propaganda re-issue
THE BATTLE OF DORKING.

You ask me to tell you, my grandchildren, something about my own share in the great events that happened fifty years ago. ‘Tis sad work turning back to that bitter page in our history, but you may perhaps take profit in your new homes from the lesson it teaches. For us in England it came too late. And yet we had plenty of warnings, if we had only made use of them. The danger did not come on us unawares. It burst on us suddenly, ‘tis true; but its coming was foreshadowed plainly enough to open our eyes, if we had not been wilfully blind. We English have only ourselves to blame for the humiliation which has been brought on the land. Venerable old age! Dishonourable old age, I say, when it follows a manhood dishonoured as ours has been. I declare, even now, though fifty years have passed, I can hardly look a young man in the face when I think I am one of those in whose youth happened this degradation of Old England—one of those who betrayed the trust handed down to us unstained by our forefathers.

What a proud and happy country was this fifty years ago! Free-trade had been working for more than a quarter of a century, and there seemed to be no end to the riches it was bringing us. London was growing bigger and bigger; you could not build houses fast enough for the rich people who wanted to live in them.
the merchants who made the money and came from all parts of the world to settle there, and the lawyers and doctors and engineers and others, and trades-people who got their share out of the profits. The streets reached down to Croydon and Wimbledon, which my father could remember quite country places; and people used to say that Kingston and Reigate would soon be joined to London. We thought we could go on building and multiplying for ever. 'Tis true that even then there was no lack of poverty; the people who had no money went on increasing as fast as the rich, and pauperism was already beginning to be a difficulty; but if the rates were high, there was plenty of money to pay them with; and as for what were called the middle classes, there really seemed no limit to their increase and prosperity. People in those days thought it quite a matter of course to bring a dozen of children into the world—or, as it used to be said, Providence sent them that number of babies; and if they couldn't always marry off all the daughters, they used to manage to provide for the sons, for there were new openings to be found in all the professions, or in the Government offices, which went on steadily getting larger. Besides, in those days young men could be sent out to India, or into the army or navy; and even then emigration was not uncommon, although not the regular custom it is now. Schoolmasters, like all other professional classes, drove a capital trade. They did not teach very much, to be sure, but new schools with their four or five hundred boys were springing up all over the country.

Fools that we were! We thought that all this wealth and prosperity were sent us by Providence, and could not stop coming. In our blindness we did not see that we were merely a big workshop, making up the things which came from all parts of the world; and that if other nations stopped sending us raw goods to work up, we
could not produce them ourselves. True, we had in those days an advantage in our cheap coal and iron; and had we taken care not to waste the fuel, it might have lasted us longer. But even then there were signs that coal and iron would soon become cheaper in foreign parts; while as to food and other things, England was not better off than it is now. We were so rich simply because other nations from all parts of the world were in the habit of sending their goods to us to be sold or manufactured; and we thought that this would last for ever. And so, perhaps, it might have lasted, if we had only taken proper means to keep it; but, in our folly, we were too careless even to insure our prosperity, and after the course of trade was turned away it would not come back again.

And yet, if ever a nation had a plain warning, we had. If we were the greatest trading country, our neighbours were the leading military power in Europe. They were driving a good trade, too, for this was before their foolish communism (about which you will hear when you are older) had ruined the rich without benefiting the poor, and they were in many respects the first nation in Europe; but it was on their army that they prided themselves most. And with reason. They had beaten the Russians and the Austrians, and the Prussians too, in bygone years, and they thought they were invincible. Well do I remember the great review held at Paris by the Emperor Napoleon during the great Exhibition, and how proud he looked showing off his splendid Guards to the assembled kings and princes. Yet, three years afterwards, the force so long deemed the first in Europe was ignominiously beaten, and the whole army taken prisoners. Such a defeat had never happened before in the world’s history; and with this proof before us of the folly of disbelieving in the possibility of disaster merely because it had never fallen upon us, it might have been supposed that we
should have the sense to take the lesson to heart. And the country was certainly roused for a time, and a cry was raised that the army ought to be reorganised, and our defences strengthened against the enormous power for sudden attacks which it was seen other nations were able to put forth. And a scheme of army reform was brought forward by the Government. It was a half-and-half affair at best; and, unfortunately, instead of being taken up in Parliament as a national scheme, it was made a party matter of, and so fell through. There was a Radical section of the House, too, whose votes had to be secured by conciliation, and which blindly demanded a reduction of armaments as the price of allegiance. This party always decried military establishments as part of a fixed policy for reducing the influence of the Crown and the aristocracy. They could not understand that the times had altogether changed, that the Crown had really no power, and that the Government merely existed at the pleasure of the House of Commons, and that even Parliament-rule was beginning to give way to mob-law. At any rate, the Ministry, baffled on all sides, gave up by degrees all the strong points of a scheme which they were not heartily in earnest about. It was not that there was any lack of money, if only it had been spent in the right way. The army cost enough, and more than enough, to give us a proper defence, and there were armed men of sorts in plenty and to spare, if only they had been decently organised. It was in organisation and forethought that we fell short, because our rulers did not heartily believe in the need for preparation. The fleet and the Channel, they said, were sufficient protection. So army reform was put off to some more convenient season, and the militia and volunteers were left untrained as before, because to call them out for drill would “interfere with the industry of the country.” We could
have given up some of the industry of those days, forsooth, and yet be busier than we are now. But why tell you a tale you have so often heard already? The nation, although uneasy, was misled by the false security its leaders professed to feel; the warning given by the disasters that overtook France was allowed to pass by unheeded. We would not even be at the trouble of putting our arsenals in a safe place, or of guarding the capital against a surprise, although the cost of doing so would not have been so much as missed from the national wealth. The French trusted in their army and its great reputation, we in our fleet; and in each case the result of this blind confidence was disaster, such as our forefathers in their hardest struggles could not have even imagined.

I need hardly tell you how the crash came about. First, the rising in India drew away a part of our small army; then came the difficulty with America, which had been threatening for years, and we sent off ten thousand men to defend Canada—a handful which did not go far to strengthen the real defences of that country, but formed an irresistible temptation to the Americans to try and take them prisoners, especially as the contingent included three battalions of the Guards. Thus the regular army at home was even smaller than usual, and nearly half of it was in Ireland to check the talked-of Fenian invasion fitting out in the West. Worse still—though I do not know it would really have mattered as things turned out—the fleet was scattered abroad: some ships to guard the West Indies, others to check privateering in the China seas, and a large part to try and protect our colonies on the Northern Pacific shore of America, where, with incredible folly, we continued to retain possessions which we could not possibly defend. America was not the great power forty years ago that it is now; but for
us to try and hold territory on her shores which could only be reached by sailing round the Horn, was as absurd as if she had attempted to take the Isle of Man before the independence of Ireland. We see this plainly enough now, but we were all blind then.

It was while we were in this state, with our ships all over the world, and our little bit of an army cut up into detachments, that the Secret Treaty was published, and Holland and Denmark were annexed. People say now that we might have escaped the troubles which came on us if we had at any rate kept quiet till our other difficulties were settled; but the English were always an impulsive lot: the whole country was boiling over with indignation, and the Government, egged on by the press, and going with the stream, declared war. We had always got out of scrapes before, and we believed our old luck and pluck would somehow pull us through.

Then, of course, there was bustle and hurry all over the land. Not that the calling up of the army reserves caused much stir, for I think there were only about 5000 altogether, and a good many of these were not to be found when the time came; but recruiting was going on all over the country, with a tremendous high bounty, 50,000 more men having been voted for the army. Then there was a Ballot Bill passed for adding 55,500 men to the militia; why a round number was not fixed on I don’t know, but the Prime Minister said that this was the exact quota wanted to put the defences of the country on a sound footing. Then the shipbuilding that began! Ironclads, despatch-boats, gunboats, monitors,—every building-yard in the country got its job, and they were offering ten shillings a-day wages for anybody who could drive a rivet. This didn’t improve the recruiting, you may suppose. I remember, too, there was a squabble in the House of Commons about whether artisans
should be drawn for the ballot, as they were so much wanted, and I think they got an exemption. This sent numbers to the yards; and if we had had a couple of years to prepare instead of a couple of weeks, I daresay we should have done very well.

It was on a Monday that the declaration of war was announced, and in a few hours we got our first inkling of the sort of preparation the enemy had made for the event which they had really brought about, although the actual declaration was made by us. A pious appeal to the God of battles, whom it was said we had aroused, was telegraphed back; and from that moment all communication with the north of Europe was cut off. Our embassies and legations were packed off at an hour’s notice, and it was as if we had suddenly come back to the middle ages. The dumb astonishment visible all over London the next morning, when the papers came out void of news, merely hinting at what had happened, was one of the most startling things in this war of surprises. But everything had been arranged beforehand; nor ought we to have been surprised, for we had seen the same Power, only a few months before, move down half a million of men on a few days’ notice, to conquer the greatest military nation in Europe, with no more fuss than our War Office used to make over the transport of a brigade from Aldershot to Brighton,—and this, too, without the allies it had now. What happened now was not a bit more wonderful in reality; but people of this country could not bring themselves to believe that what had never occurred before to England could ever possibly happen. Like our neighbours, we became wise when it was too late.

Of course the papers were not long in getting news—even the mighty organisation set at work could not shut out a special correspondent; and in a very few days,

Lecture
Friday, May 5th.
General Sir William Codrington, G.C.B., in the Chair.
The Study of Military Science in Time of Peace
By Lieutenant-Colonel Charles C. Chesney, R.E.

‘I suppose that there is no person present, with any degree of thought, but must have occupied himself in some degree during the last few months with the problem, how did the Prussians form that matchless Army which they possess? It is to that problem I propose chiefly to address myself today.

There are two ways, if one may judge from an unbiased study of history, by which great and successful armies are formed; two ways very distinct in themselves.

One is by a process equivalent to that which we hear of in philosophy as natural selection, a process by which an Army is gradually formed under the pressure of actual experience in the field. By such a process Napoleon obtained the Grand Army which made himself so great. And by such a process Wellington formed the Peninsula Army, whose glories have illustrated our own annals. Wellington, for instance, taking him as a special example, had years wherein to frame his departments carefully, one by one, with that wonderful attention to detail in which perhaps he was never surpassed by any man. He had time to dismiss incompetent Officers, to advance those that were useful to him, to build up day by day was necessary for his Army in the field: he created, first, division that could act singly under trustworthy Officers: and then, finally, though in a kind of tentative and feeble manner comparatively, did he form corps d’armée at the end of his career. He had time also to advance in his strategy from small things to great, until from merely defending a few earthworks, he thrust the French, with the final tremendous blow dealt at Vittoria, out of the Peninsula, and himself followed them into their own country, thenceforth destined to bear the burned of invasion in her turn.

Such was the manner in which the Army of the Peninsula was framed. But its formation in that way I take leave to say, to this audience in particular, has been I none sense a real national misfortune to our country. I assert this because I have found, after many years’ study of the subject of Army Reform, that you are constantly met with the objection, “Why do you require Army Reform. When we had so perfect an Army in the Peninsula?” It is hardly necessary, however, now-a-days (although it was necessary not many years ago even in this room) to defend the study of strategy, of tactics, of the various parts of military science, one by one. But although this is not requisite now, at this point of our remarks it cannot be too often or too clearly declared that there never will again – by any possibility – be given to an English General anything like the time which Wellington had wherein to frame an Army. It is simply hopeless to expect or reckon on it. Without supposing what our friend
Blackwood has this month in a very striking picture of an ideal invasion – that our fleet might be swept away at the very outset of war – it is not to be imagined that there will be seven years, or three, or even one year granted us in which to form an Army out of the raw material. I hope in this country that there will never again be the dangerous delusion which existed at the time of the Crimean war, that you had only to pay a number of men to come into the ranks of our infantry battalions, and that you would be able to put them into the field and frame them into a proper organization in front of the enemy, and that in that way you could form at will an Army like the Peninsula Army.

But there is a second way of creating a great Army, and that I take leave to call the Prussian system: a way of building it up carefully by theoretical science in time of peace. If asked why I call it the Prussian system, I reply, because I find it is the Prussian system in my own life-time, and it was the Prussian system one hundred and thirty years ago, at the time of the battle of Mollwitz. I go back to that time because the era of the battle of Mollwitz was one that has been represented afresh in some of its incidents by those in our time. The sudden astonishment of the world at finding an Army so much better than other armies; an Army that yet had been formed in peace, and whose leaders had had a peace-training principally; this surprise which happened then, has happened again in our day. I speak, of course, not so much of this last war of Prussia against France, as of the war with Austria four years ago.’


‘In Blackwood’s Magazine there has lately been a famous article called “The Battle of Dorking.” I should not mind this “Battle of Dorking,” if we could keep it to ourselves, if we could take care that nobody belonging to any other country should know that such follies could find currency or even favour with portions of the British public; but unfortunately there things go abroad, and they make us ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world. I do not say that the writers of them are not sincere – that is another matter – but I do say that the result of these things is practically the spending of more and more of your money. Be on your guard against alarmism. Depend upon it that there is not this astounding disposition on the part of all mankind to make us the objects of hatred.’
CHAPTER EIGHT [Complete]

FRIDAY NIGHT

The most extraordinary thing to my mind, of all the strange and wonderful things that happened upon that Friday, was the dovetailing of the commonplace habits of our social order with the first beginnings of the series of events that was to topple that social order headlong. If on Friday night you had taken a pair of compasses and drawn a circle with a radius of five miles round the Woking sand pits, I doubt if you would have had one human being outside it, unless it were some relation of Stent or of the three or four cyclists or London people lying dead on the common, whose emotions or habits were at all affected by the new-comers. Many people had heard of the cylinder, of course, and talked about it in their leisure, but it certainly did not make the sensation that an ultimatum to Germany would have done.

In London that night poor Henderson's telegram describing the gradual unscrewing of the shot was judged to be a canard, and his evening paper, after wiring for authentication from him and receiving no reply--the man was killed--decided not to print a special edition.

Even within the five-mile circle the great majority of people were inert. I have already described the behaviour of the men and women to whom I spoke. All over the district people were dining and supping; working men were gardening after the labours of the day, children were being put to bed, young people were wandering through the lanes love-making, students sat over their books.

Maybe there was a murmur in the village streets, a novel and dominant topic in the public-houses, and here and there a messenger, or even an eye-witness of the later occurrences, caused a whirl of excitement, a shouting, and a running to and fro; but for the most part the daily routine of working, eating, drinking, sleeping, went on as it had done for countless years--as though no planet Mars existed in the sky. Even at Woking station and Horsell and Chobham that was the case.

In Woking junction, until a late hour, trains were stopping and going on, others were shunting on the sidings, passengers were alighting and waiting, and everything was proceeding in the most ordinary way. A boy from the town, trenching on Smith's monopoly, was selling papers with the afternoon's news. The ringing impact of trucks, the sharp whistle of the engines from the junction, mingled with their shouts of "Men from Mars!" Excited men came into the station about nine o'clock with incredible tidings, and caused no more disturbance than drunkards might have done. People rattling Londonwards peered into the darkness outside the carriage windows, and saw only a rare, flickering, vanishing spark dance up from the direction of Horsell, a red glow and a thin veil of smoke driving across the stars, and thought that nothing more serious than a heath fire was happening. It was only round the edge of the common that any disturbance was perceptible. There were half a dozen villas burning on the Woking border. There were lights in all the houses on the common side of the three villages, and the people there kept awake till dawn.

A curious crowd lingered restlessly, people coming and going but the crowd remaining, both on the Chobham and Horsell bridges. One or two adventurous souls, it was afterwards found, went into the
darkness and crawled quite near the Martians; but they never returned, for now and again a light-ray, like the beam of a warship’s searchlight swept the common, and the Heat-Ray was ready to follow. Save for such, that big area of common was silent and desolate, and the charred bodies lay about on it all night under the stars, and all the next day. A noise of hammering from the pit was heard by many people.

So you have the state of things on Friday night. In the centre, sticking into the skin of our old planet Earth like a poisoned dart, was this cylinder. But the poison was scarcely working yet. Around it was a patch of silent common, smouldering in places, and with a few dark, dimly seen objects lying in contorted attitudes here and there. Here and there was a burning bush or tree. Beyond was a fringe of excitement, and farther than that fringe the inflammation had not crept as yet. In the rest of the world the stream of life still flowed as it had flowed for immemorial years. The fever of war that would presently clog vein and artery, deaden nerve and destroy brain, had still to develop.

All night long the Martians were hammering and stirring, sleepless, indefatigable, at work upon the machines they were making ready, and ever and again a puff of greenish-white smoke whirled up to the starlit sky.

About eleven a company of soldiers came through Horsell, and deployed along the edge of the common to form a cordon. Later a second company marched through Chobham to deploy on the north side of the common. Several officers from the Inkerman barracks had been on the common earlier in the day, and one, Major Eden, was reported to be missing. The colonel of the regiment came to the Chobham bridge and was busy questioning the crowd at midnight. The military authorities were certainly alive to the seriousness of the business. About eleven, the next morning’s papers were able to say, a squadron of hussars, two Maxims, and about four hundred men of the Cardigan regiment started from Aldershot.

A few seconds after midnight the crowd in the Chertsey road, Woking, saw a star fall from heaven into the pine woods to the northwest. It had a greenish colour, and caused a silent brightness like summer lightning. This was the second cylinder.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN [Extract]

IN LONDON

My younger brother was in London when the Martians fell at Woking. He was a medical student working for an imminent examination, and he heard nothing of the arrival until Saturday morning. The morning papers on Saturday contained, in addition to lengthy special articles on the planet Mars, on life in the planets, and so forth, a brief and vaguely worded telegram, all the more striking for its brevity.

The Martians, alarmed by the approach of a crowd, had killed a number of people with a quick-firing gun, so the story ran. The telegram concluded with the words: "Formidable as they seem to be, the Martians have not moved from the pit into which they have fallen, and, indeed, seem incapable of doing so. Probably this is due to the relative strength of the earth's gravitational energy." On that last text their leader-writer expanded very comfortingly.

Of course all the students in the crammer's biology class, to which my brother went that day, were intensely interested, but there were no signs of any unusual excitement in the streets. The afternoon papers puffed scraps of news under big headlines. They had nothing to tell beyond the movements of troops about the common, and the burning of the pine woods between Woking and Weybridge, until eight. Then the St. James's Gazette, in an extra-special edition, announced the bare fact of the interruption of telegraphic communication. This was thought to be due to the falling of burning pine trees across the line. Nothing more of the fighting was known that night, the night of my drive to Leatherhead and back.

My brother felt no anxiety about us, as he knew from the description in the papers that the cylinder was a good two miles from my house. He made up his mind to run down that night, in order, as he says, to see the Things before they were killed. He dispatched a telegram, which never reached me, about four o'clock, and spent the evening at a music hall.

In London, also, on Saturday night there was a thunderstorm, and my brother reached Waterloo in a cab. On the platform from which the midnight train usually starts he learned, after some waiting, that an accident prevented trains from reaching Woking that night. The nature of the accident he could not ascertain; indeed, the railway authorities did not clearly know at that time. There was very little excitement in the station, as the officials, failing to realise that anything further than a breakdown between Byfleet and Woking junction had occurred, were running the theatre trains which usually passed through Woking round by Virginia Water or Guildford. They were busy making the necessary arrangements to alter the route of the Southampton and Portsmouth Sunday League excursions. A nocturnal newspaper reporter, mistaking my brother for the traffic manager, to whom he bears a slight resemblance, waylaid and tried to interview him. Few people, excepting the railway officials, connected the breakdown with the Martians.

I have read, in another account of these events, that on Sunday morning "all London was electrified by the news from Woking. "As a matter of fact, there was nothing to justify that very extravagant phrase. Plenty of Londoners did not hear of the Martians until the panic of Monday morning. Those who did took some time to realise all that the hastily worded telegrams in the Sunday papers conveyed. The majority of people in London do not read Sunday papers.

The habit of personal security, moreover, is so deeply fixed in the Londoner's mind, and startling intelligence so much a matter of course in the papers, that they could read without any personal tremors: "About seven o'clock last night the Martians came out of the cylinder, and, moving about
under an armour of metallic shields, have completely wrecked Woking station with the adjacent houses, and massacred an entire battalion of the Cardigan Regiment. No details are known. Maxims have been absolutely useless against their armour; the field guns have been disabled by them. Flying hussars have been galloping into Chertsey. The Martians appear to be moving slowly towards Chertsey or Windsor. Great anxiety prevails in West Surrey, and earthworks are being thrown up to check the advance Londonward. "That was how the Sunday Sun put it, and a clever and remarkably prompt "handbook" article in the Referee compared the affair to a menagerie suddenly let loose in a village.

No one in London knew positively of the nature of the armoured Martians, and there was still a fixed idea that these monsters must be sluggish: "crawling," "creeping painfully"--such expressions occurred in almost all the earlier reports. None of the telegrams could have been written by an eyewitness of their advance. The Sunday papers printed separate editions as further news came to hand, some even in default of it. But there was practically nothing more to tell people until late in the afternoon, when the authorities gave the press agencies the news in their possession. It was stated that the people of Walton and Weybridge, and all the district were pouring along the roads Londonward, and that was all.

My brother went to church at the Foundling Hospital in the morning, still in ignorance of what had happened on the previous night. There he heard allusions made to the invasion, and a special prayer for peace. Coming out, he bought a Referee. He became alarmed at the news in this, and went again to Waterloo station to find out if communication were restored. The omnibuses, carriages, cyclists, and innumerable people walking in their best clothes seemed scarcely affected by the strange intelligence that the news venders were disseminating. People were interested, or, if alarmed, alarmed only on account of the local residents. At the station he heard for the first time that the Windsor and Chertsey lines were now interrupted. The porters told him that several remarkable telegrams had been received in the morning from Byfleet and Chertsey stations, but that these had abruptly ceased. My brother could get very little precise detail out of them.

"There's fighting going on about Weybridge" was the extent of their information.

The train service was now very much disorganised. Quite a number of people who had been expecting friends from places on the South-Western network were standing about the station. One grey-headed old gentleman came and abused the South-Western Company bitterly to my brother. "It wants showing up," he said.

One or two trains came in from Richmond, Putney, and Kingston, containing people who had gone out for a day's boating and found the locks closed and a feeling of panic in the air. A man in a blue and white blazer addressed my brother, full of strange tidings.

"There's hosts of people driving into Kingston in traps and carts and things, with boxes of valuables and all that," he said. "They come from Molesey and Weybridge and Walton, and they say there's been guns heard at Chertsey, heavy firing, and that mounted soldiers have told them to get off at once because the Martians are coming. We heard guns firing at Hampton Court station, but we thought it was thunder. What the dickens does it all mean? The Martians can't get out of their pit, can they?"

My brother could not tell him.

Afterwards he found that the vague feeling of alarm had spread to the clients of the underground railway, and that the Sunday excursionists began to return from all over the South-Western "lung"--Barnes, Wimbledon, Richmond Park, Kew, and so forth--at unnaturally early hours; but not a soul had
anything more than vague hearsay to tell of. Everyone connected with the terminus seemed ill-tempered.

About five o’clock the gathering crowd in the station was immensely excited by the opening of the line of communication, which is almost invariably closed, between the South-Eastern and the South-Western stations, and the passage of carriage trucks bearing huge guns and carriages crammed with soldiers. These were the guns that were brought up from Woolwich and Chatham to cover Kingston. There was an exchange of pleasantries: “You’ll get eaten!” “We’re the beast-tamers!” and so forth. A little while after that a squad of police came into the station and began to clear the public off the platforms, and my brother went out into the street again.

The church bells were ringing for evensong, and a squad of Salvation Army lassies came singing down Waterloo Road. On the bridge a number of loafers were watching a curious brown scum that came drifting down the stream in patches. The sun was just setting, and the Clock Tower and the Houses of Parliament rose against one of the most peaceful skies it is possible to imagine, a sky of gold, barred with long transverse stripes of reddish-purple cloud. There was talk of a floating body. One of the men there, a reservist he said he was, told my brother he had seen the heliograph flickering in the west.

In Wellington Street my brother met a couple of sturdy roughs who had just been rushed out of Fleet Street with still-wet newspapers and staring placards. “Dreadful catastrophe!” they bawled one to the other down Wellington Street. "Fighting at Weybridge! Full description! Repulse of the Martians! London in Danger!” He had to give threepence for a copy of that paper.

Then it was, and then only, that he realised something of the full power and terror of these monsters. He learned that they were not merely a handful of small sluggish creatures, but that they were minds swaying vast mechanical bodies; and that they could move swiftly and smite with such power that even the mightiest guns could not stand against them.

They were described as "vast spiderlike machines, nearly a hundred feet high, capable of the speed of an express train, and able to shoot out a beam of intense heat." Masked batteries, chiefly of field guns, had been planted in the country about Horsell Common, and especially between the Woking district and London. Five of the machines had been seen moving towards the Thames, and one, by a happy chance, had been destroyed. In the other cases the shells had missed, and the batteries had been at once annihilated by the Heat-Rays. Heavy losses of soldiers were mentioned, but the tone of the dispatch was optimistic.

The Martians had been repulsed; they were not invulnerable. They had retreated to their triangle of cylinders again, in the circle about Woking. Signallers with heliographs were pushing forward upon them from all sides. Guns were in rapid transit from Windsor, Portsmouth, Aldershot, Woolwich--even from the north; among others, long wire-guns of ninety-five tons from Woolwich. Altogether one hundred and sixteen were in position or being hastily placed, chiefly covering London. Never before in England had there been such a vast or rapid concentration of military material.

Any further cylinders that fell, it was hoped, could be destroyed at once by high explosives, which were being rapidly manufactured and distributed. No doubt, ran the report, the situation was of the strangest and gravest description, but the public was exhorted to avoid and discourage panic. No doubt the Martians were strange and terrible in the extreme, but at the outside there could not be more than twenty of them against our millions.
The authorities had reason to suppose, from the size of the cylinders, that at the outside there could not be more than five in each cylinder—fifteen altogether. And one at least was disposed of—perhaps more. The public would be fairly warned of the approach of danger, and elaborate measures were being taken for the protection of the people in the threatened southwestern suburbs. And so, with reiterated assurances of the safety of London and the ability of the authorities to cope with the difficulty, this quasi-proclamation closed.

This was printed in enormous type on paper so fresh that it was still wet, and there had been no time to add a word of comment. It was curious, my brother said, to see how ruthlessly the usual contents of the paper had been hacked and taken out to give this place.

All down Wellington Street people could be seen fluttering out the pink sheets and reading, and the Strand was suddenly noisy with the voices of an army of hawkers following these pioneers. Men came scrambling off buses to secure copies. Certainly this news excited people intensely, whatever their previous apathy. The shutters of a map shop in the Strand were being taken down, my brother said, and a man in his Sunday raiment, lemon-yellow gloves even, was visible inside the window hastily fastening maps of Surrey to the glass.

Going on along the Strand to Trafalgar Square, the paper in his hand, my brother saw some of the fugitives from West Surrey. There was a man with his wife and two boys and some articles of furniture in a cart such as greengrocers use. He was driving from the direction of Westminster Bridge; and close behind him came a hay waggon with five or six respectable-looking people in it, and some boxes and bundles. The faces of these people were haggard, and their entire appearance contrasted conspicuously with the Sabbath-best appearance of the people on the omnibuses. People in fashionable clothing peeped at them out of cabs. They stopped at the Square as if undecided which way to take, and finally turned eastward along the Strand. Some way behind these came a man in workday clothes, riding one of those old-fashioned tricycles with a small front wheel. He was dirty and white in the face.

My brother turned down towards Victoria, and met a number of such people. He had a vague idea that he might see something of me. He noticed an unusual number of police regulating the traffic. Some of the refugees were exchanging news with the people on the omnibuses. One was professing to have seen the Martians. "Boilers on stilts, I tell you, striding along like men. Most of them were excited and animated by their strange experience.

Beyond Victoria the public-houses were doing a lively trade with these arrivals. At all the street corners groups of people were reading papers, talking excitedly, or staring at these unusual Sunday visitors. They seemed to increase as night drew on, until at last the roads, my brother said, were like Epsom High Street on a Derby Day. My brother addressed several of these fugitives and got unsatisfactory answers from most.

None of them could tell him any news of Woking except one man, who assured him that Woking had been entirely destroyed on the previous night.

"I come from Byfleet," he said; "man on a bicycle came through the place in the early morning, and ran from door to door warning us to come away. Then came soldiers. We went out to look, and there were clouds of smoke to the south—nothing but smoke, and not a soul coming that way. Then we heard the guns at Chertsey, and folks coming from Weybridge. So I've locked up my house and come on."
At the time there was a strong feeling in the streets that the authorities were to blame for their incapacity to dispose of the invaders without all this inconvenience.

About eight o'clock a noise of heavy firing was distinctly audible all over the south of London. My brother could not hear it for the traffic in the main thoroughfares, but by striking through the quiet back streets to the river he was able to distinguish it quite plainly.
Some Questions to Consider

1. What strategies does Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Chesney use to provoke anxiety about war and invasion in *The Battle of Dorking*?
2. What is the significance of a military officer like Chesney utilising the popular tale to convey his views on military reform?
3. What relationships can you suggest between the genre of invasion fiction and other forms of fin-de-siècle popular fiction/culture?
4. *The Battle of Dorking* had a huge impact socially, politically and within the military at the time, but has been largely forgotten, while *The War of the Worlds* has remained popular right up to today. Why do you think this might be?
5. What is the importance of new technologies in both novels?
6. Why do you think both authors focus so much of specifics of time and place?