

Chapter 3 The Cylinder Opens

When I returned to the common, the sun was setting. Groups of people were hurrying from the direction of Woking. The crowd around the pit had increased to a couple of hundred people, perhaps. There were raised voices, and some sort of struggle appeared to be going on around the pit. As I got nearer, I heard Stent's voice:

'Keep back! Keep back!'

A boy came running towards me.

'It's moving,' he said to me as he passed – unscrewing and unscrewing. I don't like it. I'm going home.'

I went on to the crowd and pushed my way through. Everyone seemed greatly excited. I heard a peculiar humming sound from the pit.

'Keep those fools back,' said Ogilvy. 'We don't know what's in the Thing, you know.'

I saw a young man – I believe he was a shop assistant in Woking – standing on the cylinder and trying to climb out of the pit again. The crowd had pushed him in.

The end of the cylinder was being screwed out from within. Nearly half a metre of shining screw stuck out. Someone pushed against me, and I almost fell down on top of the screw. I turned, and as I did the screw came out and the lid of the cylinder fell onto the sand with a ringing sound. I pressed back against the person behind me, and turned my head towards the Thing again. I had the sunset in my eyes and for a moment the round hole seemed black.

I think everyone expected to see a man come out – possibly something a little unlike us on Earth, but more or less a man. I know I did. But, looking, I soon saw something grey moving within the shadow, then two shining circles – like eyes. Then something like a little grey snake, about the thickness of a

walking-stick, came out of the middle and moved through the air towards me – and then another.

I suddenly felt very cold. There was a loud scream from a woman behind. I half-turned, still keeping my eyes on the cylinder, from which other tentacles were now coming out, and began pushing my way back from the side of the pit. I saw shock changing to horror on the faces of the people around me, and there was a general movement backwards. I found myself alone, and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off. I looked again at the cylinder, and felt great terror.

A big, greyish round creature, the size, perhaps, of a bear, was rising slowly and painfully out of the cylinder. As it moved up and caught the light, it shone like wet leather. Two large dark-coloured eyes were looking at me steadily. The head of the thing was rounded and had, one could say, a face. There was a mouth under the eyes, and its lipless edge shone wetly. The whole creature was breathing heavily. One tentacle held onto the cylinder; another moved in the air.

Suddenly, the creature disappeared. It had fallen over the edge of the cylinder and into the pit. I heard it give a peculiar cry, and then another of these creatures appeared in the deep shadow of the door.

I turned and ran madly towards the first group of trees, perhaps a hundred metres away. I fell a number of times because I was running with my head turned round. I could not take my eyes away from these creatures.

The common was now covered with small groups of people. They were all very frightened, but still interested in the strange happenings in the pit. Then I saw a round object moving up and down. It was the head of the shop assistant who had fallen in, looking black against the hot western sky. He got his shoulder and knee up, but again he seemed to slip back until only his head was visible. Then he disappeared, and I thought I heard a faint

scream. For a moment I wanted to go back and help him, but I was too afraid.

The sun went down before anything else happened. The crowd around the pit seemed to grow as new people arrived. This gave people confidence and as darkness fell, a slow, uncertain movement on the common began. Black figures in twos and threes moved forwards, stopped, watched, and moved again, getting closer and closer to the pit.

And then, coming from the direction of Horsell, I noticed a little black group of men, the first of whom was waving a white flag. They were too far away for me to recognize anyone there, but I learned afterwards that Ogilvy, Stent and Henderson were with others in this attempt at communication. As the group moved forwards, a number of other people started to follow them.

Suddenly, there was a flash of light and bright greenish smoke came out of the pit in three separate clouds, which moved up, one after the other, into the still air.

The smoke (or flame, perhaps, would be a better word for it) was so bright that the deep blue sky overhead seemed to darken as these clouds rose. At the same time we could hear a faint sound, which changed into a long, loud humming noise. Slowly a dark shape rose out of the pit and a beam of light seemed to flash out from it.

Then flashes of bright fire came from the men, and I realized that the Martians were using some kind of invisible ray. Then, by the light of their own burning, I saw each of the men falling, and their followers turning to run.

I stood staring, watching as man after man fell over. As the unseen ray of light passed over them, trees caught fire and even the bushes exploded into flame. And far away to the west I saw flashes of trees and bushes and wooden buildings suddenly set on fire.

This flaming death, this invisible sword of heat, was sweeping round quickly and steadily. I knew it was coming towards me

because of the flashing bushes it touched, but I was too shocked to move. All along a curving line beyond the pit, the dark ground smoked. Then the humming stopped and the black, rounded object sank slowly out of sight into the pit.

All this happened so quickly that I stood without moving, shocked by the flashes of light. If that death had swung round a full circle, it would have killed me. But it passed and let me live, and left the night around me suddenly dark and unfamiliar. There was nobody else around. Overhead the stars were coming out, and in the west the sky was still a pale, bright, almost greenish blue. The tops of the trees and the roofs of Horsell were sharp and black against the western sky. Areas of bush and a few trees still smoked, and the houses towards Woking station were sending up tongues of flame into the stillness of the evening air.

I realized that I was helpless and alone on this dark common. Suddenly, like a thing falling on me from above, came fear. With an effort I turned and began an unsteady run through the grass.

The fear I felt was panic – terror not only of the Martians but of the dark and stillness all around me. I ran crying silently as a child might do. After I had turned, I did not dare look back.

Chapter 4 Mars Attacks

I ran until I was totally exhausted and I fell down beside the road. That was near the bridge by the gas-works.

I remained there for some time.

Eventually I sat up, strangely puzzled. For a moment, perhaps, I could not clearly understand how I came there. My terror had fallen from me like a piece of clothing. A few minutes earlier there had only been three things in my mind: the great size of the night and space and nature, my own weakness and unhappiness, and the near approach of death. Now I was my normal self again