

Film Critique
Extraterrestrial Intelligence
War of the Worlds
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War of the Worlds is about the martian invasion of Earth. When the Earth reaches the closest point in its orbit to Mars, meteorites begin landing on Earth. Our hero, Dr. Forrester was camping in the mountains near where one landed. He is called to investigate and determines the meteorite is suspiciously light and radioactive. Here he also meets our other hero, Sylvia Van Buren. Later the meteorite was discovered to be a Martian space ship when three Martian attack machines emerge and begin destroying the town. They are equipped with a power heat ray, which creates a magnetic field destroying nearby technology. More Martian space ships begin landing all over the world. Then the army arrives to try and fight the Martians, but the Martians have superior force field technology that deflects all attacks. Our heroes retreat to Dr. Forrester's lab hoping to study more about the Martians and find a weakness. However at this point the Martians are attacking everywhere and they are forced to try to move the lab. Sylvia and Dr. Forrester get separated in the confusion. They reunite in a church just as a Martian spaceship crashes through the wall. All seems lost until the space ship keels over and crashes into the ground. They investigate and discover that the Martian is dead, killed by an Earth pathogen its immune system wasn't prepared for.

War of the Worlds describes a worst case encounter with extraterrestrial intelligence. The martians are life from another planet that has come to Earth. Unfortunately they have come to conquer and not coexist. The Martians have their own culture distinct from Earth. The number three is tremendously important to them (their eyes have three lenses, their hands have three fingers, their attack groups have three ships in them, etc.). They also have impressive technology including spaceships, hovercrafts, force fields, and heat rays.

In the film, human science is portrayed as a source of hope, but also portrayed as ineffective. One of our heroes, Dr. Forrester is a renowned scientist and his opinion carries great weight among the generals and other important world leaders. When they need a new solution to beat the Martians, it is a scientific lab that the leaders turn to. At the same time, human technology is shown to be ineffective. They drop an atomic bomb, the most sophisticated and deadly human

weapon at the time (and today), on the Martians to no effect. Furthermore, science and human ingenuity don't save the day. Instead a pathogen, already present in the Earth atmosphere, is what defeats the Martians.

All of the human technology in the movie is fairly accurate for the 1950s. The military used tanks and planes that fired bullets and rockets. However the portrayal of the atomic bomb was very misleading. When the bomb is dropped, everyone is far too close to survive the blast. Yet everyone is fine and they don't seem to care about radiation poisoning. Also the description of the other planets in the Solar System at the beginning of the movie had many of the facts incorrect. For example, they describe Jupiter as a planet full of volcanic mountains, but we now know Jupiter is made of gas instead of rock.

The Martian spaceships are not feasible. They do get hot as they enter the atmosphere and seem to have shielding to protect them from this. Also they timed the launch for when the Earth was closest to Mars. This is how we time our Mars rover missions today. But the Martian spaceships had no obvious propulsion system. As we saw earlier in the semester it isn't feasible to fire the spaceships out of a large cannon, so it is unclear how they achieved escape velocity.

The description of the Martian weapon is also confused. The weapon is described as heat ray, which vaporizes anything it hits. We computed earlier that vaporizing a human takes enormous amounts of power, beyond our current technology, but it is potentially possible. However this heat ray is also supposed to cause a magnetic field that disrupts all technology, phones, watches, television, etc. Magnetic pulses can disrupt electronics, but shouldn't disrupt wind up watches. Also heat isn't on the electromagnetic spectrum, so the pulse being caused by the heat ray doesn't make sense.

Overall this is fun science fiction film, considering an interesting scenario. The twist ending is a unsatisfying, but intentionally so. However the movie is very dated. There are only two female characters, with only one female lead. On top of that, most of her lines were about being scared. By today's standards this is pretty atrocious.