

THE MARTIAN DIARIES

BY

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VOLUME.1 THE DAY OF THE MARTIANS

Part 2

The Tearoom

Arriving home very late, I was instantly irritated by the loud ticking of the hallway clock. Tick... one less breath... tock... one less second to do anything... tick... your time is nearly up... I stopped the pendulum immediately and made my way up to bed. Closing my eyes, any sleep I managed, ended in strange and hideous nightmares. Dreams about people I knew, I feared the most. Any expression on a human face would start to contort slowly into that of an exuberant Martian. It was as disturbing as it was horrible. Unsure of the time now, I gave up trying to sleep and went to sit in my study. The hollow silence from the hallway seemed to grow louder; 'killing time' took on a whole new meaning and I considered going downstairs to restart the clock. A train passed quickly by, high on the embankment opposite, headed towards London. Soon after all was still, silent again, and I missed the comfort of my wife more than ever. I considered the current situation, comparing it to the circumstances of the earlier Martian invasion, and I found the similarity unsettling. This was the second time I had sent my wife away, supposedly to safety, when humanity was on the brink of extinction. My fear of never seeing Laura again gathered like a storm, and seemed to worsen by the hour. I remembered the tearoom where we had first met and wondered what had become of it.

It was still dark as I left the house as quietly as I could, trying my utmost not to disturb my neighbours. I just wanted to find the tearoom in Woking. We had spent many a happy hour

there, but the name of the place eluded me. I hoped that the walk in the fresh air would help me rest better. I was surprised when the chimes of the local clock tower suggested five or six in the morning. The dawn chorus started with a single tweet and I heard it repeated again and again, as more birds awoke from their slumbers. How simple and yet how beautiful. How else could any morning in England begin?

Fifteen minutes later, I stood outside a small shop which should have been the tearoom. Gone were the neat rows of tables and their accompanying chairs. The place where an inviting menu used to hang in the window was empty. I could still see odd chairs, tables, tea pots and cups inside, along with bedsteads and marble-surfaced pot cupboards, and other odd bits of old furniture and bric-a-brac. The tearoom, the wonderful silver cake stand and its delightful wares, were gone and so was its name, which still completely escaped me. I could feel my excitement turn to disappointment and to despair. I had lost something of value, a keepsake, long-vanished in the great vaults of time. It was a simple thing, just a name, the name of the place where the best moment of my life had occurred. I now felt an even greater distance between my wife and me. Sadly, at this hour, no one else was up, or stirring it seemed. The desolate mood of early Woking only eased as I strolled in what seemed an aviary full of singing birds.

I remembered that, during the last invasion, I had walked similarly empty streets in London as a vagrant. The dampness of the time of day was still the same as years ago, and so was the hunger gnawing at my stomach for breakfast. Back then no birds sang, as life tried to hide and where possible, flee from the Martian onslaught. Turning to go home I heard a cold, steady voice and it startled me; I wasn't sure if I was mistaken as I heard the words of my very thoughts.

"You all alone then? Lost your wife? Lost your sleep?" I did not know how to answer the stranger. There was something vaguely familiar about that voice. He carefully kept his face in shadow, avoiding any chance of being seen. "Where are you headed?" he continued. I barely shook my head from side to side. "Got any drink?" Again I shook my head slowly. "Seems that I got more than you then!" He laughed horribly.

"Who are you?" I dared to ask.

"You mean you don't know? Of course you do. Please, excuse my manners, sir. Here, sit just here..." I sat wearily on the steps with my back to him. He continued, "You let them take me, didn't you?"

"Who took you? To where?"

"To another world..."

"What are you talking about, what are you saying?"

"You didn't have much of a stomach for me then. Neither did the Martians..."

"Your voice! You're the Curate? I don't believe it! You're dead! The Martians took you..."

"Hard to believe? You have to believe. Belief is all we have, especially in this church."

"Church? A church is a building and we're not inside one."

"Are you so lost you don't know where you are? We are all in church right now. Can't you feel the absolute grandeur and specialness of it all?"

"What do you mean, man? There **is** no building here!" I insisted.

"Mistake. The great mistake. The greatest mistake of many. The church **is** the people and where we live and breathe. The pretty ones and the ugly, the young and the old, the rich and those who have less, the sinners and those without sin. Anyone and everyone living under the heavenly dome of that there sky, is in church. Who do you think made it for us? Humble now... we should be humble... humble ourselves..."

I looked up and saw how pretty, purple-blue the sky was in this early light - the colour of bluebells.

"Thank you," I heard myself say. The name of the tearoom was 'Bluebells' and I thoroughly savoured the memories of it. I stood, even more tired now, to return home. "Thank you," I offered again, but there was no answer. I used the toe of my shoe to probe the pile of clothes, but there was no one there.

The Southern Front

The Council of Men took place in Whitehall, London. On the agenda was what to tell the general public. It was commonly known that a smallish cluster of Martian projectiles would arrive at least a day or so ahead of the main body of the comet. Grave concerns of mass hysteria, rioting and disruption filled the halls of power. It seemed to me that the collapse of the economy was feared far more than a Martian invasion.

As the rumours spread, there was a great and momentous upheaval of the population from the south-east of England. The Tryfan projectile was moved without ceremony to the Kent coast and it immediately triggered a mass exodus out of Essex and Kent. The predicted landing areas of the Martians were recalculated and updated daily. Churches began to fill and so did public spaces too. Hospitals and schools began a refuge for the sick and elderly.

A path, fifteen miles long and a mile wide was cleared, to entice the Martians to retrieve their disabled projectile. That same projectile now shone like a homing beacon brighter than ever, from its new position on Northway Hill near Reculver. The Army continued the strategic positioning of hundreds, if not a thousand heavy, short-range guns, cannon and munitions in newly-dug trenches along the south of this path. Excalibur was lowered into position. The trenches were loosely covered with used rails and train-track from nearby lines, and cleverly camouflaged with nets, trees and branches. To the north, and far out at sea, began the biggest naval gathering ever seen. A huge, international flotilla of warships waited silently for the command to blanket the area with Tryfanite, then to open fire and destroy any Martian who stood there.

Arrival of the Comet

On the 21st of December, in the evening, long greenish streaks of luminescence were seen high in the sky. The Major and I stood next to the projectile on Northway Hill as tens of meteors fell quickly. They struck the ground with force, sending tons of sand, dirt and dust billowing high into the air. One cylinder was followed by another, then another. Sixty or more landed in quick succession and in close proximity. Just like the sea beyond, the ground was no longer static: it moved and heaved in waves. The landing site became like a dragon's lair amid hellish smoke, dust and ash. The Martian cylinders clustered like red-hot eggs and the heat radiation of the nest caused everything nearby to instantly burst into flames. The new hour of the Martians had begun...

Headquarters suddenly became a of hive of activity. "They have all landed in Kent, none in Essex. Send message to the Navy, giving the exact co-ordinates of the Martians," ordered the Major. "Good news everyone, they have decided to come for their friend after all, and straight into our trap. How many did you count? Sixty-six or seven?"

The Fighting Machines

It was clear that the Major had become a commander. Anyone senior would tell him to carry on, which he was more than happy to do. An aide addressed him directly: "Sir, the Emergency Evacuation plans are still proceeding in the area of the landings. We have been asked to help get the civilians out – we need to get them out now."

"Us? Why haven't they gone? What's keeping them? Look, use the empty ordnance carriages that are down there," the Major snapped. "I want them filled to the brim with people. We can get even more out along the coast - use every boat available. Get that request to the police. It's time to completely clear the area. I don't want any distractions for those Martians once they start to move. I want those fighting machines to focus on nothing else but the retrieval of that projectile. It won't be long before they are out of the nest."

Ogilvy said, "You are correct Major. You must all remember, the main body of the comet is still in the sky. It is that which is the real threat, and what we should be most scared of. The

comet is made up of thousands of projectiles and it is absolutely imperative that we smash and destroy the landing party at all costs. We must deter the rest of them from coming here. That green-eyed monster must not be allowed to fragment. It must keep in formation and head back deep into space. Nothing else from it is to enter our atmosphere. Nothing, I tell you!"

"Thank you Mr. Ogilvy. Smash them to smithereens! Is there anything else you would like me to put on this long list of mine?" enquired the Major sarcastically.

Ogilvy shook his head. "No, never mind... I am just tired."

The Major continued, "Very well then, let's keep cool heads, and our minds on the job. Where are my weather reports? Yes, that looks like the best we can expect for this time of year. Let's hope it stays that way."

Looking down, I found that I had a new train ticket to Wales in my hand. I did not remember purchasing it, and I had evidently been out Christmas shopping too. Pretty and neatly wrapped packages were balanced on top of my suitcase, which I also had no memory of packing or bringing with me. I thought of Laura and suddenly the global reach and scale of the Martian intent and capabilities, especially with the use of their shadow-weapon, concerned me. Alarmed by a sense that somehow, all of our attempts to keep busy, to make a difference, were pathetic and feeble, I announced, "All we have are rocks and stones. We should go home and be with our loved ones." I immediately wished I hadn't said it.

"Not everyone has a loved one to go home to, you know. And you should be taking those pills of yours more regularly, I'm sure," Ogilvy muttered. "I do wish I hadn't told you so much, I don't know what came over me. I burdened you. Quiet, here comes the Major."

"What is going on?" the Major demanded.

"Nothing except injury and tiredness. Well now, it appears that I must hurry back to my work and that wretched heat ray if we are to fight with more than just rocks and stones. I must certainly do what I must. Keep me informed of events, Major. Keep an eye on him too, and

completely disregard anything foolish that he says." Ogilvy then quietly left.

The Major frowned, and noticing my suitcase said, "I'm not a nursemaid, never have been. Are you off to Wales to be with your wife? Now, would be a good time to leave."

Laura. I had mostly forgotten her in the mad rush of preparation for the new invasion. Then it dawned on me that it was my duty to be here, no matter how feeble or misplaced our response to the forthcoming battle. I had to trust again to fate and to providence. If I could somehow help here, and assist in the destruction of the coming monsters, there was a possibility that my wife would be able to live out the rest of her life, free of the awful Martian menace. I took my train ticket to Wales back out of my pocket. Looking at it again I said, "I'm staying."

"Good man! Then in that case, you'd better follow me," the Major replied.

The view from Northway Hill was a scene from another world. Gone was the heat shimmer and glow of red hot metal. Instead, everything was lit in an eerie, softgreen alien hue, the energy haze of the Martian nest, whose luminescence was matched only by the green of the comet above. Strange, loud noises were heard, as the Martians set to work tirelessly, building their machines. They were also in the midst of the construction of a triangular pyramid; a huge and perfect structure. If Ogilvy's theory was correct, it was indeed a refuge from the shadow-weapon.

And so it was, that later the same day, on the evening of the 23rd of December at 7.31pm, the Martians tested their heat ray once more upon the Earth. The destructive ray caught the ancient Roman towers of Reculver that had stood tall, proud and defiant for centuries , turning them instantly to shooting spires of intense flame and collapse. At this, the Martians exulted with such force, as to shake the world. Never had such a loud and unworldly sound reverberated with such menace. The time for our preparations was indeed over, and this, a new war with the Martians had begun.

In the Trench

The shadow-weapon above was nearing its full operational potential and the Martians here on Earth were running out of time and needed protection from it. Excalibur's trench now became the Major's headquarters. I decided that it would be best for everyone if I kept out of the way. Climbing up a hastily rigged ladder, I looked towards the finished and perfect pyramid and the more intense green glow of the Martian nest. The distant sounds of machinery and metalwork, the pace of the Martian construction, had been relentless and not human in its ferocity. It was troubling.

I heard the Major giving orders. "Right, time for Operation Thunderbolt! Let's give those Martians enough dust to make them feel at home. I want that Tryfanite blowing all over every inch of them, and in places they have long forgotten they had. Smother the fighting machines, that pyramid and especially the nest. All Tryfanite must be fully delivered within the two minutes. I want it done now. Give the order!"

I watched the twinkling and sparkling of hundreds of distant flashes far out at sea, as the huge fleet of international warships fired their weapons almost in unison. It was hard to believe that four hundred tons of blue powdered Tryfanite, packaged in hollowed out shells, was hurtling through the air at this moment, ready to burst high above the Martians. The rumbling sound of distant thunder that was the concussion of the ships' guns, reached us from over the waters.

The Major shouted, "Everyone in the trench now! Those shells will be here any second!" We heard the screams of them as the air blasts began in earnest. "Masks on everyone! Let's not breathe the Tryfanite - save every ounce for the Martians!".

The shells dispersed the Tryfanite powder as planned. Great care was taken not to hit or directly engage the Martians, whose fighting machines began to stir at the sound of the loud bombardment and the looming clouds of dust. Two minutes later the firing ceased. In the lull, all human eyes watched the mineral as it began drifting in a cloud of dense fog, over and around the invaders on the ground, dimming and obscuring most of the light of their green energy.

"Almost perfect," I allowed myself to say. Excalibur was primed with special high-yield explosive. Slowly and deliberately, the heavy cannon was pointed into the heart of the man-made fog, by the Major's crew. They had become confident, efficient, and I could see why the Major had chosen these gunners. Then another order was given and the cannon discharged mercilessly.

Instinctively, I held my hands over my ears and watched Excalibur lurch as it roared into life. But, there was no distant detonation or explosion that should have sparked the chain reaction of the Martian energy and the Tryfanite into blue lightning. There was nothing.

"No, no! We must fire again! We have only a minute or so before the Tryfanite disperses," I exclaimed in alarm.

"One hundred seconds is plenty of time!" shouted back the Major, as he barked orders at the gun crew to quickly reload.

"Try it now!" I cried, and instantly Excalibur began to move and recoil, sending yet another high-yield explosive hurtling towards the gloom of powdered Tryfanite. Again, there was no corresponding impact or explosion. Carefully I climbed the slippery ladder as high as I dared to. The silhouette of distant Martian equipment was blurred. The fighting machines were releasing thick smoke because they were being targeted. The real purpose of that smoke was nothing to do with camouflage; it was to kill any life form that it touched.

It suddenly dawned on me that the failure to spark the Tryfanite now meant that the Martians could not be stopped. Our only chance of any sort of success had slipped away yet, here we all were, waiting. We waited for what? That black death would eventually drift into and fill each and every one of the trenches? Our gas masks would offer little or no protection. I looked around at what was soon to become my grave. Cold sweat on my forehead began to form into droplets. I wiped them away quickly with my sleeve. The forgotten bruise made itself known to me again.

Was that it then? Weren't the warships even going to fire at least one single shot? In the colder conditions of the trench I then asked the question aloud, as I felt the first tremors of

the approaching Martian fighting machines. Was this really the best that humanity could do? What insanity had possibly possessed me to even be here? We had indeed hurled rocks and stones at the Martians and for what? I was out of time. I had no where to run to... to escape from them or the black smoke.

Observing the thinning cloud of Tryfanite, my vision blurred and my head began to spin. Hopes I had of any sort of victory were almost gone. The billowing black of the Martian smoke seemed to change colour to a lesser deep grey, as now it bristled with thin spikes of hundreds of Martian search lights. To say that this resembled a giant, hairy caterpillar was not wrong, but for certain, it was poisonous in the extreme and carried the deadly sting of countless heat rays. It seemed to sway now, and the rhythmic movement of the blackness made it appear alive, like a creature, a predator, that would soon devour the world. I sensed the vibrations from the ground were now slower, much deeper, heavier than I expected. I glanced again towards the Martians and saw that they had reached the edge of the path about two hundred yards from me. They were searching for the Excalibur.

Through the darkness of their smoke, came the first glint of a silver fighting machine with a small heat ray. My heart then missed several beats. The fighting machine was not a tripod at all. It was a huge, five-legged pentapod and the heat ray it carried was the same size and detail as any seen before. But it was the scale of the Martian machine that was different; not only was it the largest but it was the most fierce and sinister fighting monster, ever. Bigger than any tripod and even worse... there were many of them.

The huge, metallic body of the monster now stalked confidently, riding on top of its five, thin legs, with its three, long serpent-like arms. It gesticulated menacingly with the heat ray. I had never seen or imagined anything like this before. Stunned, I could not help but continue to stare in disbelief and horror, at what I did not want to see. In the cold winter air, I felt the beginnings of a deeper chill. My wits deserted me and in the terror of it, I found that I cried out fearfully to my God for deliverance, knowing that man alone could not prevail against such evil and terrifying apparitions. The Martians had taken us by surprise once more, and I loathed and hated them for it.

I watched the leading monster's five, thin legs adjust awkwardly in front of me. The limbs

hisssed as they moved, yet the body of the machine, high above the ground, was stable and seemed to glide effortlessly to a stop. The black smoke behind it had ceased as others joined it on the path. The leading pentapod began to sing in a terrifyingly loud exultation, and together, the fighting machines all pointed their search lights, hundreds of them, skywards at the comet and created a massive column of light. The alien sound of the Martian monsters vibrated through my mind, through my body, and shook me to my very soul. We were being serenaded by the fighting machines; it was the death-knell of all human life and civilisation.

Louder than the Martians however, there now came a familiar sound, which almost made me jump out of my skin. The Major responded with an unexpected exultation of his own. Confused, I realised that my sense of time had slowed dramatically and only tens of seconds had actually passed since the last time it fired. I could not comprehend how we were able to reload and discharge once again, for this, the third time.

Through the smoke created by Excalibur, I could see that the five-legged colossus had turned in my direction. The beam of its searchlight formed a small, intense pool of light that flowed silently, quickly, across mud, dirt and branches. The light was headed towards me and kept coming, zig-zagging on the ground, as surely as a wolf following a scent. The hot air and smoke from the cannon on such a cold night was sure to be seen. What had the Major done? Why did he so pointlessly fire again? For what reason did he shorten our already shortened lives? Angry with myself. my head pounded as overwhelmed, I knew that I had wasted the extra three months that were so generously given to me. It was precious time that Laura and I should have spent together. I would never see her again.

I ducked back into the trench looking for somewhere to quickly hide. The Major and the gunners were busy with Excalibur but stopped what they were doing to look up and watch the intense searchlight of the pentapod scrutinise the pall of smoke that emanated from our trench. I felt again the sickening horrors I had known years ago when, in the confines of a collapsed house, my only other companion was the Curate. He had unnecessarily brought the Martians down on us, after his own lack of faith had weakened his mind and turned him completely mad. Was the Major insane too? He had caused this Martian pentapod to look for me now. It knew I was hiding here and it would eventually seek me out with the certainty of a heat ray. The Martian had indeed pin-pointed our location, and it knowingly raised its

heat ray, and aimed it straight at me. Petrified, I was doomed...

Instantly time froze, in an all encapsulating, blinding brilliance of green and white. For an eternity, I marvelled at the ferocious nature and extreme intensity of the beam, the greatest display of raw energy I had ever witnessed. So this was it. It seemed the Martians had developed a new, super heat ray, an awesome beauty with a purity of hatred, the revenge weapon that had been so feared by mankind. A beam so elegant, and yet, unimaginably terrible. For no reason I found it comforting. In the glaring illumination, I felt no heat, no pain, no fear, only an unexplained elation, mixed with a remote sadness. I knew it was all over. We had failed. Blinded, I could no longer see. A tear welled in my eye as I thought of Laura. Then, there was nothing...

In darkness, I awoke with a desperate fear of Hell in my stomach, an awful taste of blood and dirt in my mouth. I felt cold, dead for sure, and this was not Heaven. I heard nothing. I could see nothing. I could feel nothing. I became aware that I had experienced such a gaunt silence only once before, in London.

I was suddenly assaulted by shrieks and high pitched screams, the sound of banshees all around me, as Hell erupted in fire, brimstone, smoke, heat and light, as shell after shell landed. It was worse than I could ever have imagined Hell to be. I gasped at the magnitude of the barrage.

"We all thought you were dead!" shouted a voice. "You need to come and see this!"

The Major's voice was distant, but somehow reassuring. Perhaps, we were still alive after all. I opened painful, sore and gritted eyes, to continual and intense flashes, and even brighter flares of cannon fire and exploding shells. In the damp and the cold of the trench, the pain of it all was unbearable. With difficulty I sat up, keeping my hands firmly over my ears and head. The ground beneath me convulsed, continually shook and trembled, as cannon upon cannon, upon cannon, blazed.

Rout

Excalibur, firing in quick succession, caused the nearby air to billow with dust and smoke like a thick London pea-souper; it blasted the Martian disabled fighting machines to smithereens. Soon Excalibur's rounds were exhausted and as the gun crew cheered, I managed to get the attention of one of them:

"We are winning, aren't we?"

"We're not winning! We've won!"

"But how? How is this possible?"

"The Major told us that Mr Ogilvy's heat ray sparked the Tryfanite just in the nick of time. The look on your face when that Martian lit you up with its searchlight... Actually, you should see your face now!"

"Ogilvy you say? And where's the Major? Is he alright?"

"When we ran out of ammo he jumped ship to the next trench. That's him, still blasting away at the Martians!" He joined the celebrations.

Ogilvy? Ogilvy's heat ray sparked the Tryfanite? It was certainly a curious thought but completely unlikely. I considered again the massive green and white pulse of super energy; if it was not aimed at me, had Ogilvy done the impossible and created a super weapon? Something far superior to anything the Martians had ever constructed? I scrambled quickly through the darkened trench, trying to avoid the gunners and find a space where I could glimpse the comet. The night sky was cloudy and the comet was not visible. Seeing that the clouds were certainly no longer green, I began to believe the impossible. Cold, wet flakes settled on my face and I felt them melt refreshingly into cool droplets of water. The snow fell gently as one by one all the guns and cannon ceased to fire. I felt humbled... and I was.

At first light on the 24th December, all around me was still... silent. The Tryfanite ash was completely blanketed by snow. Indistinct forms began to move, to emerge from their trenches

all along the Southern Front, some cheering and laughing, others grouped together, greeting each other with 'Merry Christmas'. Hundreds, if not a thousand soldiers, now stood and stared at the cratered landscape, the snow-covered tangle of twisted metal, the ghostly wreckage of hundreds of the monstrous fighting machines, and their motionless heat rays. No Martian searchlight shone from that bewitched metal forest, or lit our sky. The pyramid was gone - destroyed. The Tryfan cylinder high up on Northway Hill, gave no hint of activity. There was no sound of any heat ray or any movement from the Martians; instead, only a bleak stillness of pure white.

I noticed now how young the soldiers were. Yesterday they were boys, children. Today they emerged as men and I knew that I watched battle hardened soldiers readied for tomorrow. I looked skywards at the huge, green comet, that Angel of Death heading towards us, still there for all the world to see and to fear. Perhaps there was no hope for tomorrow, but today, this day, belonged to us. It was ours, and we clung to it gladly.

Bleak

Ogilvy came to visit the remains of the Martian nest. He pointed out his position on Northway Hill where he had set up his heat ray, not far from the Tryfan projectile. Through the cold and snow, we carefully picked our way towards the shattered line of huge, broken pentapods and the smaller tripods. It was a most eerie silence and frightening vista, to see where the Martian monsters once stood and were now collapsed.

It is the 24th of December 1913, I thought, for no particular reason. It was indeed Christmas Eve, but the strangest one I had ever known. All around us were the signs of heavy impact and warfare, a scene greatly softened by the blanketing snow. Palls of smoke came from hundreds of fires that still burned furiously, dotting the landscape.

We noticed the remains of some tripods. How small they seemed now, compared to their pentapod brothers. Each and every pentapod was smashed and pulverised differently. I

thought Ogilvy should be pleased but instead he appeared anxious. He removed his hat to scratch his head, and I noticed how badly bruised he was, just above the back of his neck. He made light of his condition, blaming the Martians. He did not stop as we strolled over to what was left of the leading pentapod.

Five, thin metallic columns stretched high into the air from the snow-covered craters. Ogilvy stood in the circle of them. I watched as he picked up a fragment of melted metal, and he appeared to scrutinise its every detail and surface.

I decided to join him. I was surprised to hear him quietly whisper 'Amen'. I was puzzled as to why he did this, in this, the strangest and most alien of locations. Was he praying? Ogilvy, to my knowledge, had never indicated any form of religious belief.

Saying nothing, I looked around me again, at the huge number of snow-filled craters, and twisted, metal shrapnel. Out to the north and east was the mud-coloured sea and dull, grey sky. All the warships were gone. It was bleak, and perhaps Ogilvy had said the perfect word that summed up everything.

Looking up at the comet he said, "I'm glad my heat ray worked. It should give the Martians in the comet something to think about. Let's hope it was enough and they turn away." That was no heat ray I thought, it was something else. I remained quiet. Ogilvy continued, "Be sure to be awake about 3.30am for a light display like no other..."

Consequences

Celebrations for the destruction of the Martian landing party continued all day. I was taken home exhausted, but having thoroughly enjoyed the experience of revenge upon the Martians. I spent a long time removing the clinging grime of blue, powdered Tryfanite and mud. Rest and sleep were further from me now than at any time in my life. I was still elated and excited, satisfied that I had been in the midst of the action and had survived the Martians head on. The savage nature of the assault upon the Martians, bore witness to our

complete hatred of them, and the day had been exciting up until now, but I no longer knew what I had been celebrating. The destruction of the Martian landing party yes, but the ending of our world too? I missed Laura immensely. I now feared the retribution of the countless Martians in the comet. It was a stark realisation that a defining moment in the history of the Earth was about to occur, and there was not the slightest reason to be merry about it.

I had promised Ogilvy that I would wait up to see the phenomenon of night turning briefly into day, an effect caused by the shadow-weapon in the comet. I could feel the cold of the night air seeping through the glass as I opened the curtains in the parlour, unsure what to expect. I had no idea how long I sat and waited in the room as I thought and agonised over much. I had foolishly sent Laura a jubilant telegram of our victory, and now knew that I had wasted the brief communication with her. Having my chance again, it would surely read, 'Come home at once...'

I could feel my pulse beginning to race, such is the power of fear of the unknown. The shadow-weapon, up until now, was a phenomenon which I had not experienced, always being a long way off in the sky. I wondered then if it was possible to protect fungus and bacteria. Surely some would survive and live, to be our allies once more and destroy the Martians. Perhaps we could have hidden or saved the microscopic life in deep caves and... Suddenly, everything became increasingly brighter. My eyes struggled to see and adjust in the cold light. I could hardly breathe in its growing intensity. Outside was like the brightest summer day ever, but it lacked the warmth and kindness of the sun. I could see the snow-covered train embankment and the wintry, leafless trees and bushes. It truly was a midnight sun, just as Ogilvy said it would be. With my eyes shut tightly and arms firmly over my face, I gasped when, almost instantly, I was plunged back into the night-time darkness of my home. I was glad to be seated. My body felt as if I had fallen off a rack after being stretched to breaking point. If it hadn't begun already, the death of all bacteria would start the next time, when the shadow-weapon would be at its closest to the Earth and at maximum brilliance. I wondered who else had witnessed the supernatural display and if Laura had seen it too.

This being Christmas Day, it was odd to be summoned to Whitehall before 9am. Ogilvy and

the Major would be there too, attending a debriefing with top politicians, scientists and military men. I knew that for me, Christmas would begin when I reached the inn where my wife lodged. The turkey and all the trimmings would be waiting for me in Wales, because Laura excelled at Christmas preparations. We would be together when everything came to an end.

I took time to fully wind the clock, knowing that within a week or so it would have to be done again, but there would be no human left alive on the planet to do it. I also knew that it was the last time I would see this house. The lump on my forehead seemed less pronounced today and, clean shaven, I stared again into the mirror at the grey-haired stranger looking back at me. I was dressed in my best Sunday suit, which now hung loosely about me. Picking up my suitcase, it was time to make my way to Whitehall. I stepped out into the snow without hesitation, into the Last Day.... The Day of the Martians.

The mood of Christmas was reflected in the glorious winter's morning and, under the clear sky, the joyous sight of children playing in the fresh snow. I resigned myself to the fact that the comet was still there above me, and I decided to ignore the fear of it, just like these youngsters were doing. My only concern was to catch the connection leaving from Crewe at 5.30pm, so I could hold Laura's hand again before supper time. All was dependant on the weather, as heavy snow at any point on my journey, would wreck my plans and hopes.

Ogilvy's heat ray success was reported in most of the newspapers and I carried one with me. I was very surprised to see that he and the Major stood outside Whitehall waiting. "Merry Christmas to you both. Am I late getting here?" I asked.

"Merry Christmas? We thought you weren't coming - gone to Wales. Well I did, and lost money on it," laughed the Major.

"And I am considerably richer, thanks to both of you. Come on, lets get out of this cold and have a hot drink or something, before the start of the meeting," suggested Ogilvy. "I insist on paying. Oh, by the way, did anyone see the display last night?"

"No one sleeps these days. I thought it was the end of the world for a minute," said the Major.

"Yes, I saw it too," I confirmed.

Considering it was a cold Christmas morning, the large number of people milling around the centre of London was unusual; no doubt they had all experienced the midnight sun and were frightened and scared by it. The door to the meeting place was opened for us and we made our way up to the room.

The debriefing began. It was noted that the comet displayed unusual signs of over-heating but there was no need for panic. It would continue to glow brightly of its own accord, every twelve and a quarter hours. Ogilvy was commended for his heat ray and was instantly applauded. Slowly he got to his feet. "Dear friends, thank you for your kindness but it is really not necessary. You all should know, I am something of an imposter, and I do not deserve to be congratulated in this way. You see, the Martian generator I used, destroyed itself once it produced that beam... Unfortunately, we don't have another to replace it. The stock piles of Tryfanite powder are completely depleted..."

"Here we go again. I knew it - pessimism!" the Major whispered angrily to me and he immediately stood and thanked Ogilvy for his efforts. The Major then talked about the counter measures that were in place around the world to defend humans in the best possible way.

Ogilvy muttered to me, "It's time to put the cards on the table. I think the game is finally up."

The Major turned to see that Ogilvy was again quietly standing, waiting to speak.

"Major, Ogilvy has something to tell us," I quietly submitted. It was awkward to be sitting between them.

"Not now, later."

"Let him speak," I insisted, and soon there were other calls for Ogilvy to have his say.

"Look, pessimism hangs around that man like a gloomy cloud in mid-winter," the Major

whispered with a false smile and looking perplexed, he sat down.

My heart pounded now. I wanted Ogilvy to tell them all to go home, to be with their families. I watched the time, anxiously holding my train ticket to Wales.

Ogilvy cleared his throat, and said that a new source of Tryfanite was needed but it would take years to find new seams around the world and to develop them properly. There was little that could be done to defeat a million alien fighting machines on a planetary scale. It was also apparent that the Martians knew about the bacterial contamination and had taken steps to safeguard themselves against it. With the limited options we possessed, we would have to fight the Martians with cannons and shells. The only possible outcome to that would be inevitable defeat and the loss of human civilisation. I remained glued to my seat, unsure of what he would do next.

Ogilvy went on to say that the trenches and the deployment of heavy, short-range artillery and weaponry, was the Major's master stroke. The Southern Front had been a military success due to the use of the trenches. Not only were the Martians deprived of any targets, but their machines were disabled and rendered completely useless by the Tryfanite and the energy beam that had sparked it. Helpless in their stalled machines, the Martian landing party was annihilated in the cross-fire of live rounds from land and the guns of the warships out at sea.

The door opened, and a uniformed woman entered quietly and handed Ogilvy a telegram. He thanked her. With all eyes on him, the room fell unnaturally silent. I held my breath too, not daring to breathe. This was it, a final judgement on Judgement Day. The announcement was brief, very matter of fact. Ogilvy said simply, "The comet has changed course, and is moving away from the Earth."

I could hardly take it in. The sentence of death had been commuted: today we would live, along with everything else on the Earth too. I stood, and began to applaud Ogilvy. He slumped down in his chair exhausted, unable to trust his own eyes or to take in the change of circumstances. The man deserved the accolade and my own personal thanks, for saving my life in the trench. He smiled now, for the first time. His torment was over and the healing

had begun.

I wanted to say goodbye to Ogilvy and the Major before I left for Wales. The two men were being treated like royalty, surrounded and engulfed by people offering their congratulations, and it was difficult to get the attention of either of them. What a contrast to our evening in the restaurant, I thought. I could now hear the sounds of triumphant bells ringing the closer I got to the exit and the street. I was delayed as more and more people came into the building. A cheer went up, not for mankind or the planet, as we had met no resistance from the Martians, but for the miracle by which we were all still alive, and once again saved.

The Moon

It was just after New Years Day, that the green Martian comet disappeared mysteriously, from the path it was predicted to take, behind and beyond the moon. No one knew for sure what had happened to it. Ogilvy said the obscuring position of the moon meant that the exact trajectory of the comet could not be viewed or witnessed from the Earth. He suggested that the comet had somehow veered off sharply, and was now on a rendezvous with Mars or the Asteroid Belt. Others believed that the Martians had miscalculated and had simply crashed into the moon and were totally destroyed.

The move to Wales, when it came, was not a particularly difficult choice for me and my wife. We became Anwyn Llewellyn's new neighbours and we changed the name of our house to 'Bluebells'. Laura visited and managed the Tryfan site daily, to restore it as best she could with the ample funding and the labour provided to her.

I received a brief letter from the Major. Other than the usual greetings and chit chat, it read,

'The scientific information I requested arrived at long last. It states that without the fine blanketing of airborne particles of the Tryfanite cloud, the Martian landing party would not have been destroyed. However, continued experimentation also showed that the process of powdering the mineral was flawed. It was only the immense power and extreme magnitude of Ogilvy's energy beam at precisely the right moment, which gave us humans the supreme

advantage over the Martians. Ogilvy instantaneously melted the leading Pentapod right off its legs, in the presence of the Tryfanite. Blue lightning erupted and jumped from one Martian machine to another, all the way back to the nest. It was the lightning that consumed and nullified their energy, disabling all Martian technology it touched. It was very impressive. Beautiful to watch. Shame you were out for the count and didn't see your idea at work. The rest was easy. The Martians were stuck and unable to move in their frozen machines. They became sitting ducks, simple target practice. It was like shooting fish in a barrel. I have only one complaint though: no one told me about the shadow-weapon inside the comet. Ogilvy knew that his Martian generator had the capacity to produce only a single high energy beam shot. If he had aimed the beam at the shadow weapon high above the Earth, the resulting explosion could have wiped out all the Martians in the comet. But that would have left hundreds of angry Martian pentapods here on the Earth to run amok. I think he chose correctly and things have certainly turned out for the best in my humble opinion. The comet was scared off and the landing party was completely smashed and turned to scrap metal. It was a most satisfactory outcome.'

I smiled, thinking again of the colossal power I had witnessed in the trench. Putting the letter away, it occurred to me that much had happened by chance concerning Ogilvy. He alone understood the Martians in a way no one else did. How he came to create the beam, a super weapon, more powerful than anything the Martians had, was still not clear. I made myself a note that I should interview the man properly.

Later, I bought myself a new and sizeable telescope. Whenever Laura would let me, and weather permitting, I would watch and observe our moon closely from under a comforting Welsh sky, looking for the unmistakable and greenish glow, of Martian activity...

Epilogue

Who can explain the evolution of human intellect or why it has occurred at all? Was man given intelligence in the Garden of Eden, so that he could appreciate what life really is and how to keep it good? Is man so removed from that garden, that his unquenchable thirst for knowledge will end in a world devoid of life? Just like the Martians, will immense calculation,

along with advances in technical thinking lead to nothing more than an empty sense of supreme superiority and complacency?

*No one could have conceived the profound secrets that Ogilvy carried, as so alien they were to mankind. Only at the end of his life did the scientist share his notes and carefully written papers, with someone he considered his intellectual equal, and perhaps his only friend. What was accurately recorded, later became known as *The Martian Diaries*...*