

The Time Machine



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF H. G. WELLS

Wells was born into a working class British family and his education was erratic—though Wells read passionately and broadly, his father sustained an injury that meant that, instead of continuing with school, Wells was put to work in various apprenticeships to support the family. These apprenticeships, particularly one as a draper that Wells loathed, were deeply influential to his lifelong political critique of the unequal distribution of wealth, a critique evident in *The Time Machine*. Wells, who had an interest in chemistry and biology, eventually apprenticed himself to a chemist and earned a spot at a university where he studied biology with Thomas Henry Huxley. Huxley, known as “Darwin’s Bulldog,” was a passionate proponent of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, which is also a notable presence in *The Time Machine*. Wells’ university years were formative to his politics (he became passionate about socialism), devotion to science, and his interest in writing. In fact, by the end of his time at university, he was beginning to see writing as his central occupation: he wrote biology textbooks and short stories, one of which (“The Chronic Argonauts”) eventually became *The Time Machine*. As a writer, Wells wrote novels that defined what are now tropes of the science fiction genre (the notion of using a machine to travel through time, for example, is his), as well as acclaimed realist novels, nonfiction works about science and history, and political tracts. Wells was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature four times, and is widely known as one of the “fathers of science fiction.”

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The two historical events most influential to *The Time Machine* are the Industrial Revolution and the publication of Charles Darwin’s 1859 magnum opus about evolution, *On the Origin of Species*. The industrial revolution, which lasted about a hundred years starting in 1740, transformed British manufacturing processes by introducing the widespread use of factories and machines to a society that had until then made products by hand at a relatively small scale. This created vast amounts of new wealth and improved living conditions dramatically across British society, but it also created staggering income inequality and miserable, or even dangerous, working conditions for laborers. The impact of the industrial revolution on *The Time Machine* is evident in the use of a machine (instead of, for example, magic) to travel in time, and also in its concern with the working conditions of the British poor and the growing divide between the poor and the British elite. Darwin’s theory

of natural selection (which Wells studied as a biology student at university) is also a major influence on *The Time Machine*. Instead of imagining uninterrupted progress for future humans, the intricacies of natural selection allowed Wells to think of how humans might evolve based on the presence of technology. As Darwin credited fear and adversity for prompting growth in animal species, Wells was able to imagine that if technology, instead of human effort, were used to meet human needs, humans could actually evolve into less sophisticated beings than they once were.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Time Machine is among Wells’ best known novels—others include [The War of the Worlds](#) and [The Island of Doctor Moreau](#). As a foundational novel of the science fiction genre, *The Time Machine* is also related to the novels of Jules Verne (including [Journey to the Center of the Earth](#), [Around the World in Eighty Days](#), and [Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea](#)) and the science fiction journals edited by Hugo Gernsback ([Amazing Stories](#), [Wonder Stories](#), [Science Fiction Plus](#), among others). These men were known, with Wells, as the three “fathers of science fiction.” *The Time Machine* is also a novel dedicated to British social reform, and, in particular, to emphasizing the destructive power of the British class system. In this way, *The Time Machine* is a close relative of the work of British novelist and social critic Charles Dickens. In particular, Dickens’ novel [A Christmas Carol](#) shares the themes of time travel and exposing the evils of class divisions.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Time Machine
- **When Written:** 1894-1895
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1895 as a serial novel
- **Literary Period:** late Victorian
- **Genre:** Science Fiction
- **Setting:** Victorian-era England, and England in the year 802,701
- **Climax:** When the Time Traveller escapes the Morlocks by taking the time machine into the future
- **Antagonist:** The Morlocks
- **Point of View:** Though the book has a first person narrator who is not the Time Traveller, the story is mostly told as the Time Traveller’s first person account of his voyage.

EXTRA CREDIT

Science Fiction or Breaking News? In 1938, filmmaker Orson Welles adapted H.G. Wells' novel *The War of The Worlds* into a radio drama that was broadcast across the United States. The radio drama, about aliens invading earth, inspired widespread panic across the country, since many listeners did not realize they were listening to a drama rather than a news bulletin.

Social Justice. Among Wells' social commitments was antiracism, and in 1906 he wrote a book called *The Future in America* that contains a chapter, called "The Tragedy of Colour," about the struggles of black Americans. In order to write the book, he met with Booker T. Washington. Wells also condemned ideas of racial purity, the death sentence of the Scottsboro Boys (African-Americans accused of raping a white woman), and racism in South Africa.



PLOT SUMMARY

The Time Machine is a work of science-fiction that imagines how the social conditions of Victorian England have evolved in the year 802,701. The story opens on a dinner party at the home of an eminent scientist, the Time Traveller, who is explaining to his assembled guests (including the narrator telling the story) principles of science and math that support the possibility of traveling across time, just as one would travel across space. His guests are upper class British men—a doctor, a psychologist, a journalist, etc.—and they greet his pronouncements with skepticism.

To demonstrate the validity of his ideas, the Time Traveller brings into the living room a small model of a machine. The psychologist, ever skeptical, depresses a lever and the machine disappears. The Time Traveller then reveals that he has almost completed a life-sized machine that will transport him through time. He shows the machine to the guests, but they remain skeptical.

At dinner the following week, the Time Traveller is not there to greet his guests. He has left a note instructing them to proceed with dinner if he is late, and partway through their dinner the Time Traveller staggers into the house looking disheveled and injured. Once the Time Traveller has washed up, he agrees to tell his story in full on the condition that nobody argues with him or asks questions, since he is terribly exhausted.

The Time Traveller says that the previous week he finished his machine and took a voyage into the future. He arrived in the year 802,701 on the spot where his laboratory once stood—it had become a garden of strange flowers beside a large white Sphinx statue. He saw small humanlike beings (whom Wells later reveals are called the Eloi), and they seemed feeble and much less intelligent than he hoped the people of the future would be.

The Time Traveller continues his tale: the beings are friendly to

him, and he begins to explore the landscape for clues to what has happened. There seems to be no adversity, fear, or labor in this world, and the Time Traveller hypothesizes that this is a communist utopia of the future, in which all social problems have been solved. He believes that this explains the weakness and stupidity of the beings—there is no need for force or intelligence in a world of peace and plenty. The Time Traveller is briefly delighted, but, despite thinking that all problems are solved, he still feels disappointed that future humans are not smarter or more curious.

When the Time Traveller returns to the garden where he landed he realizes that his time machine is gone. He briefly goes into a rage-fueled panic, and then decides that the rational course of action is to study this new world, learn its ways, and let this knowledge lead him back to the time machine. Seeing grooves in the grass leads him to believe that the machine has been hidden behind a metal panel in the pedestal of the Sphinx statue, but it won't give when he tries to open it.

The Time Traveller begins learning the language of the Eloi (which is very simple) and he explores the landscape, noticing a strange network of dry wells and towers, which suggests a large underground ventilation system. He also notices that the Eloi never seem to do any work, but their sandals look new and their clothes are not frayed. This observation, combined with his having felt something touching him at night and having caught a glimpse of a strange white animal, leads him to determine that his original utopian explanation is inadequate. Later that day he rescues a drowning Eloi. Her name is Weena, and she begins giving him **flowers** and following him everywhere to express her gratitude.

Weena's agony whenever he leaves her and her fear of the **dark** make the Time Traveller realize that the Eloi are not without fear and danger. One morning while seeking shelter from the heat he sees a white ape dash down the shaft of one of the wells he had previously observed. The Time Traveller concludes, feeling disgusted, that the Eloi are not the only species that have evolved from humans of his day: the Morlocks, as the ape beings are called, are human descendants, too.

The Time Traveller determines that the Eloi and Morlocks evolved as such because of the entrenched class divisions of Victorian England. The Eloi are the descendants of the British elite, and the Morlocks the descendants of the British poor—the Eloi, the Time Traveller believes, have been exploiting the Morlocks for centuries, and, as a result, have easy lives. Meanwhile, the Morlocks, toiling underground for the Eloi, can no longer bear to be in the light—their eyes have evolved in a way that light pains them.

Knowing that knowledge of the Morlocks might lead him to his time machine, the Time Traveller descends into one of the wells where he sees a room full of Morlocks and machines. He sees them eating meat, which tells him they are carnivorous, unlike

the Eloi. When several Morlocks attack him, he uses matches to fend them off and barely escapes. He has a sense that the Morlocks are evil.

To search for weapons against the Morlocks, the Time Traveller and Weena voyage to a large green building that the Time Traveller had seen in the distance. On the way, Weena puts flowers in the Traveller's pocket, as a kind gesture. He realizes while walking that the Morlocks are cannibals—they eat the Eloi—and this is the source of Weena's great fear. The trip takes two days, but the green building turns out to be an abandoned museum, and inside it he finds a preserved box of matches and an iron bar he can use as a weapon. He and Weena head back for the garden with the goal of retrieving the time machine from the Sphinx statue.

The Time Traveller knows he will have to stop somewhere for the night, so he gathers kindling as they walk in order to start a fire that will keep them safe from Morlocks. Walking through a thick wood, the Time Traveller feels the Morlocks grabbing at him, so he puts his kindling down and sets it ablaze to protect them as they walk on. Outside the sphere of light, though, the Morlocks return and Weena faints. The Time Traveller starts a fire and falls asleep.

When he wakes up the fire is out, Weena is gone, and the Morlocks are attacking him. He fends them off with the iron bar and then realizes that his previous fire had started a forest fire, and the Morlocks are fleeing the blaze rushing towards him. The Time Traveller runs, too—he escapes, but Weena dies, and his matchbox disappears. He only has a few loose matches in his pocket as tools to get his time machine back.

Back at the Sphinx, the Time Traveller sleeps. When he awakens, the panels on the pedestal are open and he sees his time machine in plain sight. He casts aside his iron bar and enters the Sphinx, but as soon as he does the panels close and he is left in darkness with the Morlocks. Moreover, his matches don't work because they are the kind that must be struck on the box. He fights them off enough to get on his time machine and pull the lever, barely escaping into the future.

The Time Traveller finds himself thousands more years in the future on a desolate beach where menacing giant crabs roam. He moves farther into the future to escape them, noticing the sun getting larger, the earth getting colder, and the air getting thinner. As signs of life wane, the Time Traveller gets scared and decides to return home. He pulls the lever and travels back to his dinner guests, disheveled and injured from his adventures.

While his guests remain skeptical of his adventures—his only evidence is that his time machine is dirty and dented and he has the strange flowers from Weena in his pocket—the narrator is inclined to believe. The narrator returns the next day and finds the Time Traveller preparing for another voyage. The Time Traveller tells the narrator to wait for him for a half hour, but

the narrator says, sadly, that it has been three years and the narrator has not returned.



CHARACTERS

The Time Traveller – Though he is not the narrator of *The Time Machine*, the Time Traveller is the book's protagonist. He is an eminent but eccentric British scientist, and his particular interest in time travel leads him to build a time machine that transports himself into the future. Much of the Time Traveller's character is revealed through his observations and storytelling—for instance, the fact that he values intelligence above all other human traits becomes clear as a result of his obsessive disappointment that the humans of the future are stupid and uncurious. The Time Traveller thinks like a scientist, always forming hypotheses about the world and adjusting them based on his observations, even if he doesn't like what these observations suggest about humanity. The other notable characteristic of the Time Traveller is that, while he is a member of the British elite (as evident by the company he keeps at dinner parties), he is not at home with them. The other elites view him as far too clever and, for that reason, suspect.

The Narrator – The narrator of *The Time Machine* is all but absent from the book. He is one of the Time Traveller's dinner companions, which suggests that he is also a member of the British elite, but his profession is not named and he does not figure into any of the Time Traveller's story about the future, which comprises the bulk of the book. The narrator is notable, though, for seeming less skeptical of the Time Traveller's story than the other dinner guests. However, the narrator does not seem to be able to fully absorb the lessons of the Time Traveller's story, even though he does believe that it happened. The narrator, unable to overcome his desire for future humans to have improved on the conditions of the present, prefers to live with the assumption that future humans will have better lives than he will. This makes him unable to fight to change the Victorian social conditions that led to the Eloi and the Morlocks in the first place, which makes the narrator a rather ineffectual vehicle for the Time Traveller's story.

The Eloi – The Eloi are humanlike creatures who are small, unintelligent, uncurious, weak, and also, importantly, benevolent and happy. They are the evolutionary descendants of the British elite, who exploited the British poor for so long that the poor evolved into a race of humanoids called the Morlocks. While the centuries of exploitation of the Morlocks complicates the picture of the Eloi as essentially good, they are a species characterized by kindness, and the Time Traveller becomes affectionate towards them on his travels. The Eloi face no adversity in their lives except that they are likely being raised for food by the Morlocks, who come to the surface of the earth at night and eat vulnerable Eloi.

The Morlocks — The British poor toiled in **dark** conditions for so long that they evolved into a subterranean race of humans who could no longer see in the daylight. While they once likely ate animals like rats that they found underground, this food supply ran out and the Morlocks became cannibalistic, preying on their evolutionary cousins, the Eloi. While the Eloi faced no adversity for centuries, thereby losing their strength and intelligence, the Morlocks (as a result of their harsh conditions) retained much greater capabilities. The Morlocks are seen by the Time Traveller as an evil species, and their clammy, pale bodies and enormous eyes certainly contribute to their menacing aura, but it's important to note that the Morlocks prey on the Eloi out of necessity. They have no other food, and they have been exploited by the Eloi for centuries, which makes their moral position complex. Nonetheless, the Morlocks are the antagonists of *The Time Machine*, and part of the book's pessimism is its conclusion that the Morlocks are on their way to ruling the earth.

Weena — Weena is an Eloi woman whom the Time Traveller saves from drowning. Though he does not expect gratitude or recognition in return for his bravery, Weena surprises and charms the Time Traveller by following him everywhere from then on and adorning him constantly with **flowers** as a sign of gratitude and affection. The Time Traveller learns important things from Weena (including that fear is, after all, a pervasive feeling among the Eloi), and it is through her companionship that he begins to feel that this strange future is his home. Nonetheless, he is conflicted about how human she really is—she's not particularly intelligent, but, as the Time Traveller says, "She always seemed to me, I fancy, more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human." Thus Weena is a being defined by kindness, and her death in a forest **fire** that the Time Traveller inadvertently started is a tragedy.

writings of Karl Marx (who died just before *The Time Machine* was written) inspired widespread critique of the exploitation of the poor by the rich. This class anxiety of the late nineteenth century was particularly pronounced in Britain because of the rigidity of the social hierarchy there—it was very hard under any circumstances for a person to escape the conditions of the class into which they were born, which H. G. Wells, having grown up poor, knew well.

Thus, *The Time Machine*, though it is primarily set hundreds of thousands of years in the future, is truly a cautionary tale about the social conditions of Victorian England. This is most apparent in the differences between the Eloi and Morlocks, the two humanlike species of the year 802,701. The Eloi are the descendants of the British elite, who, through exploitation of the poor, have created living conditions so easy and idyllic that the species has actually regressed, losing the intelligence and strength that characterize present-day humans. Meanwhile the Morlocks, the descendants of the British working class, have toiled underground for so long that they've lost their ability to see in the **daylight** and have resorted to cannibalism. Wells uses the distinctions between these two species to posit that the divisions between social classes in Victorian England are so stark and harmful that they could lead the human species to split into two different species, each embodying some of the worst characteristics of humans. The fear and violence that characterizes the relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks is also meant to echo the tensions between workers and elites in Victorian Britain. Wells asks readers to consider that this relationship, if not reconciled, could evolve into something much nastier.

The very structure of the narrative of *The Time Machine* is also reflective of the theme of inequality. The Time Traveller recounts his journey into the future to a room full of social elites (an editor, doctor, journalist, psychologist, etc.), both because these are his friends and also because they are the people who have power to effect change in British society, and the Time Traveller expects his account to be impactful. While the Time Traveller is a respected scientist, he seems not quite at home in these circles: the others view him as an eccentric and he's uncomfortable with servants (he "hates to have [them] waiting at dinner"). So the Time Traveller occupies a complicated class position that, perhaps, makes him uniquely suited to reflect on the class distinctions he encounters in the future. It's also notable that, in Wells' vision, even the Time Traveller's movement hundreds of thousands of years in the future does not allow him to transcend his class. The Time Traveller is more at home with the Eloi than the Morlocks, just as he was socializing with elites in Victorian England. The science fiction world of 802,701 then, is a dystopian projection into the future based on inequality between Victorian social classes, but it is also simply an exaggeration for emphasis of the social conditions that were contemporary with Wells' writing.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL CLASS

The Time Machine, written in Britain in 1895, is the product of an era of great anxiety about social class and economic inequality. The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had generated incredible wealth in Britain, but that wealth went almost entirely to the upper classes instead of being equally distributed to the lower-class workers whose labor was instrumental to industrial prosperity. Moreover, the economic



TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRESS

The Time Machine opens with the Time Traveller explaining to his dinner guests the underlying scientific principles that make his invention, the time machine, possible. This immersion into mathematical concepts and scientific language is meant to give readers a taste of the intelligence, creativity, and ambition that fuel technological development. In contrast, the Eloi of the future lack language, technology, and even physical strength—they are presented as a lazy species that naps and frolics and eats copious amounts of fruit. The Eloi's living conditions are so idyllic that they do not struggle to meet their basic needs, and the Time Traveller interprets this, at first, as a realization of technological utopia free from worry or deprivation. However, the presence of the Morlocks—who have resorted to cannibalism because their basic needs have not been met—makes it clear that technology has not been a liberating force for everyone.

While many works of science fiction revel in the complex and exciting technologies of the future, *The Time Machine* takes an opposite approach, positing that the Victorian era could be the technological pinnacle of humankind, followed by a deterioration of the technological and cultural progress that many people expect to continue indefinitely into the future. Writing on the heels of the industrial revolution, Wells was immersed in a society saturated by the promise and peril of new technology. Suddenly new goods were available, and once-arduous tasks were made easier, but there were also new dangers like rampant pollution and industrial accidents, not to mention exacerbations of social divisions based on new wealth and poor labor conditions. Interestingly, Wells does not imagine that this Victorian technological boom would continue indefinitely, nor does he imagine a world imperiled by a technology-related disaster. Instead, he imagines something more complex: that technological progress could create living conditions so idyllic that human progress and intelligence disappear, and so disastrous that humans could resort to cannibalism. Technology in *The Time Machine* is then directly linked to both progress and to intellectual decay and violence.

Wells is consistently ambivalent about the role of technology in human society; the differences between the lives of the Eloi and Morlocks are more broadly symbolic of the dueling promise and peril of technological innovation, and this directly reflects the social conditions of Victorian England in which technology created ease, wealth, and freedom for the upper class, and punishing working and living conditions for the lower classes. This duality is seen, too, in the time machine itself, which is both liberating (in that it makes time travel possible, which could before only be imagined) and perilous (for instance, the Time Traveller could materialize inside a solid object in the future, or he could be stranded in dangerous conditions).

Thus, Wells does not find an easy answer to whether technology is good or bad for humanity. On the one hand, technological progress can improve lives, but, on the other hand, technology can destroy the very conditions that make humans vibrant and capable, and it can exacerbate social divisions. The key to technology might, then, be found in the Time Traveller himself, who uses technology not to wield power over others, but to ask questions about the status quo and bring back knowledge that could help humanity. In other words, the Time Traveller can be seen as emblematic of science itself—he relentlessly forms hypotheses about the future and then readjusts them based on observation in order to generate knowledge, which mirrors the scientific method. If the Time Traveller represents science free of corrupting social forces, then Wells is suggesting that the Time Traveller's tale, with all of its implications for social justice, is what technology can offer at its best.



HUMANS, NATURE, AND THE UNIVERSE

One of the most radical aspects of *The Time Machine* is that it questions the centrality of human beings to history by challenging the notion that humans will endure in their present form forever. Written about thirty-five years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin's seminal text on evolution, *The Time Machine* takes Darwin's theory of evolution seriously and explores its possible consequences. In *The Time Machine*, present-day humans have diverged into two different species, neither of which is stronger, smarter, or more moral than contemporary people. The Eloi are helpless, the Morlocks are cannibals, and both species have lost the language and intelligence that characterize contemporary humans.

In the late nineteenth century, when *The Time Machine* was written, many thinkers were trying to make sense of Darwin's new theory, which led to a proliferation of different, and sometimes contradictory, ideas. Wells embraced some of those—the idea of natural selection itself, obviously, and the idea that struggle is what produces strength—but he rejected social Darwinism, a set of ideas positing that the human species could be improved by selecting only the “best” humans to reproduce. The Eloi, who are the descendants of the British elite (and thus the people whom social Darwinists would prefer to reproduce) have degenerated into a silly and helpless species, which challenges both the idea of the inherent superiority of the upper classes, and the notion (a misinterpretation of Darwin's actual ideas) that natural selection means that humans will naturally improve forever. In fact, a rigorous reading of Darwin suggests only that a species adapts to the conditions with which it is presented—as in *The Time Machine*, the technology-enabled ease of the Eloi leads them to evolve in a way that present humans would consider regression, an adaptation consistent with Darwin's ideas.

In addition to showing a future in which humans have evolved into different species, Wells also shows a future in which humans do not exist at all. Chapter Eleven finds the Time Traveller on a beach in the distant future in which the only signs of life seem to be giant crustaceans and algae that has washed ashore. Wells' descriptions of the changed sky—there is no moon, the constellations are different, the atmosphere is thin, and the sun is dying—are reminders that the human species is but a blip when considered in the scale of geologic time. The universe is much, much older than humans—so, too, the Earth—and both will endure long after humans are unrecognizable or gone. This, in tandem with Wells' treatment of Darwinism, serves as a reminder of the limited power of human beings to control their own fate and the fate of the world at large. While the time machine itself is a feat of technology and innovation that seems to promise mastery of humans over natural processes, the end of *The Time Machine* shows this notion to be hubristic. The time machine is but an impressive tool—it cannot, itself, change the power or destiny of human beings, or enhance their relatively minor role in the universe.



FEAR AND KINDNESS

Throughout *The Time Machine*, Wells shatters several common assumptions of human thought (for example, the belief in the inevitable progress of

the species, the notion that technology will make human life better, and the insistence that people are at the center of the universe and will endure forever). However, two aspects of humanity whose value Wells does not question are the experience of fear and the ability to feel kindness. These qualities are roughly symbolized by the Eloi, who are peaceful and kind, and the Morlocks, who are strong and capable because of the hardship and fear with which they live.

For Wells, a large part of what makes humans special is their intelligence, ambition, and creativity, but Wells rejects the notion that these are qualities inherent to humankind. He writes, "It is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger, and trouble." Since the Eloi live in a world without the motivating forces of adversity and fear (except for the threat of the Morlocks, before which the Eloi are helpless), the Eloi have become less than human. Conversely, the Morlocks (the descendants of the British poor) live in difficult conditions and are fearful of one another due to the practice of cannibalism. As such, the Morlocks are a much more capable (though less moral) species than the Eloi. This is a direct challenge to the kind of utopian thinking that would consider a world without struggle to be the ultimate achievement of humankind. If struggle and fear are part of what makes us human, then living in a utopia would, paradoxically, rob human beings of their defining characteristics. An ideal world for Wells, then, is one in which

humans must work, strive, and take risks, but not to the point that they become depraved like the Morlocks.

Wells presents kindness as a characteristic even more definitive of human beings than fear. Indeed, the endurance of kindness is, perhaps, the only redemptive aspect to an otherwise bleak book. Wells writes in the epilogue (referring to the Time Traveller's Eloi friend Weena's kindness), that the narrator was comforted to know that in the future "even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man." This is a fitting ending for the book, as kindness is at the heart of the Time Traveller's own mission. His trip into the future is not for the purposes of gaining power or wealth (which one could easily imagine as an alternate storyline), but rather for obtaining knowledge. Once the Time Traveller realizes the dark truth of the future, he returns to his own time in order to raise the alarm to the people who might have the power to effect meaningful change. This, itself, is an act of kindness and empathy on behalf of all people, and it embodies Wells' idea that kindness is the quality that redeems humanity from its depravities.

It's worth noting, too, that Wells wrote *The Time Machine* at a moment when Freud's ideas of the subconscious were becoming widespread, and part of the eeriness of the world of 802,701 is its evocation of the human psyche. Above ground, which can be seen as a parallel to the conscious mind, the Eloi are kind and fun-loving and they live in harmony with one another. Underground, which parallels the subconscious, the Morlocks are depraved and cannibalistic. The structure of the world 802,701 (in which the Eloi and Morlocks are in conflict with one another but also interdependent) suggests that the kindness of the Eloi and the fear and depravity of the Morlocks are inseparable in the human psyche, which is another way of talking about the complexities of human nature.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



LIGHT, DARKNESS, AND FIRE

In *The Time Machine*, darkness is directly associated with the evil Morlocks (as they can only see in the dark), and light is associated with the benevolent Eloi, who live in the sunlight. However, as this is a novel that concerns itself with muddying easy binaries and respecting complexity, the distinction between darkness and light, or what is good and what is bad, unravels over the course of the book. For example, the fire that the Time Traveller sets in the woods is meant to bring light to the darkness, protecting the Time Traveller and Weena from danger and depravity. When the fire spreads to the whole forest, killing Weena and endangering the Time

Traveller's life, the distinctions between light and darkness, safety and danger, and good and evil break down. This breakdown resonates, too, on the level of psychology. The Time Traveller is trying desperately to understand what makes a creature human, and he tries to neatly separate out good from evil in order to believe that humans are essentially good. The Eloi and the Morlocks, though, are interdependent—the Eloi are food for the Morlocks, and the Morlocks do work for the Eloi—just as darkness and light are terms that only make sense relative to one another. Through the intertwined symbolism of darkness and light, Wells leads readers to the conclusion that good and evil are inseparable in the human psyche.



WEENA'S FLOWERS

The Time Traveller values intelligence above all other human traits, and he is disappointed that future humans are not only unintelligent, but also weak, silly, and uncurious. For a while, his relationship to the Eloi is defined only by intellectual interest and not by real empathy, but it is through his friendship with Weena that he begins to feel true affection for and identification with these creatures. Put another way, it is in the kindness of the Eloi that the Time Traveller can locate their humanity. Weena loves putting flowers in the Time Traveller's pockets (she treats his pockets like "an eccentric kind of vase for floral decoration"), and this gesture represents the kind nature of the Eloi. Weena's flowers are also the only piece of compelling evidence of his travels that the Time Traveller brings back to the present, and they represent hope for humanity in the face of such a bleak tale of the future of mankind. As the narrator notes, the flowers serve "to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man."



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Signet Classics edition of *The Time Machine* published in 2014.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ What might appear when that hazy curtain was altogether withdrawn? What might not have happened to men? What if cruelty had grown into a common passion? What if in this interval the race had lost its manliness, and had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful? I might seem some old-world savage animal, only the more dreadful and disgusting for our common likeness—a foul creature to be incontinently slain.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As the Time Traveller is about to stop the time machine and enter an unknown future, he muses about what he might find. He had previously eagerly anticipated encountering an advanced race of humans who had improved, over the millennia, on the humans of his era. This, then, is his first flicker of doubt. He realizes that human progress is not necessarily linear—nobody knows what adaptations and circumstances characterize the people of the future, and the Time Traveller's fear is that future humans might be powerful and cruel. He worries that these creatures might not respect him, as a weaker and less-developed version of them, and that he might die at their hands. Here, the Time Traveller thinks about kindness and sympathy as human traits that he fears might be lost, but he never questions the advancement of future humans' strength and intelligence—this suggests that he thinks of strength and intelligence as more definitive of humanity than kindness. It also puts into perspective that humans, as we know them, have not been and will not be permanently in their present form throughout history. Humans evolve, just like the landscape and other animals, and these evolutions are not predictable.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ Seeing the ease and security in which these people were living, I felt this close resemblance between the sexes was after all what one would expect; for the strength of a man and the softness of a woman, the institution of the family, and the differentiation of occupations are mere militant necessities of an age of physical force...

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Eloi

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

When the Time Traveller meets the Eloi he is initially disappointed to realize that they are feeble and unintelligent. However, the Time Traveller had assumed that people would have improved over the ages, so he works to fit his new observations into that framework. The way to make this future seem to be an improvement on the

past is to believe that the Eloi are a utopian society whose particular characteristics have resulted from the ease and security with which they live—the Time Traveller suggests that they lost strength, intelligence, gender division, and clearly-defined family units because they no longer needed to work and protect one another. In this way, the Time Traveller frames the characteristics of the humans of his era as backwards. This hypothesis proves to be incorrect, and its formation shows the perils and process of the scientific method. The Time Traveller makes sense of his observations by fitting them into an existing framework of thought, and it is not until his observations have overwhelmingly contradicted this framework (the advancement of the species) that he is able to re-evaluate the framework and see what is really happening in the future.

●● Strength is the outcome of need; security sets a premium on feebleness. The work of ameliorating the conditions of life—the true civilizing process that makes life more and more secure—had gone steadily on to a climax. One triumph of a united humanity over Nature had followed another. Things that are now mere dreams had become projects deliberately put in hand and carried forward. And the harvest was what I saw!

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Eloi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

The Time Traveller's utopian explanation of the Eloi society is at its most exuberant here. He assumes that, from his era onward, humans had come together to solve all the problems facing them and they had succeeded. The Eloi, he believes, are the race that resulted from mankind's triumph over nature and adversity, and their characteristics that seem to be regressions (weakness, stupidity) are really just adaptations to utopian conditions. When he refers to the "harvest," what he implies is that he is witnessing the fruits of hundreds of thousands of years of work to overcome adversity. This, he imagines, must be the pinnacle of the human race. The Time Traveller's need to fit the Eloi into his framework of human progress shows how powerful the idea is that humans will constantly improve. The physical and mental weakness of the Eloi might have immediately suggested a backsliding of humanity, had the Time Traveller not been so convinced that this species must be the result of progress.

●● Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough—as most wrong theories are!

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Once the Time Traveller has fully explained his theory that the Eloi are the result of utopian triumph over all adversity, he admits that he was wrong in his initial assessment. The Time Traveller's way of thinking about and understanding the world closely mirrors the scientific method, and here the Time Traveller's comments reflect the fact that, in scientific thought, the first hypothesis is often wrong. Initial assessments often only take into account what is most clearly known and they are often warped by bias. It is only when many observations and hypotheses have been made and contradicted that a comprehensive picture of reality can emerge. The Time Traveller also remarks on complexity here, stating that when a hypothesis is too simple it's often wrong. The remainder of the book is an exploration of the contradictions and complexities inherent to technology, society, and the human psyche. Wells' goal with this book is to complicate the reader's ideas of things that had once seemed straightforward, as, so often, is the role of science.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● To sit among all these unknown things before a puzzle like that is hopeless. That way lies monomania. Face this world. Learn its ways, watch it, be careful of too hasty guesses at its meaning. In the end you will find clues to it all.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

After the Time Traveller realizes that his time machine is missing and his temper gets the best of him, he passes a fitful night of sleep and wakes up feeling more clearheaded about the way forward. Being violent and impulsive out of anger and fear is not the most rational or effective way to get his time machine back, he realizes, but rather he must take advantage of his intelligence, curiosity, and patience in order to piece together clues as to where his machine is.

This approach contrasts with the Eloi, who do not appear to have the intellectual fortitude to piece together clues, and who also seem to have never encountered a challenge like the one the Time Traveller is facing. This is further evidence (though the Time Traveller does not fully acknowledge this yet) that the Time Traveller is more advanced and capable than the species of the future. This passage also underscores the Time Traveller's reliance on intelligence and observation to navigate the world. Throughout the book, he insists that intelligence and curiosity are the bedrock traits of humanity. It's never clear if this is Wells' opinion, or if this is the Time Traveller's personal bias (one that is consistent with his passion for science), but the Time Traveller finds that intelligent observation is always the way forward.

For, by merely seeming fond of me, and showing in her weak, futile way that she cared for me, the little doll of a creature presently gave my return to the neighborhood of the White Sphinx almost the feeling of coming home.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), Weena

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

The Time Traveller saves Weena from drowning without any expectation that she will understand what he did or be able to feel gratitude, but she surprises him with her deep displays of affection and her sudden commitment to remaining at all times by his side. Until Weena became his friend, the Time Traveller had no emotional connection to these beings and no affection for the world they lived in. It's notable that it's Weena's kindness and devotion—which the Time Traveller seems to value less than intelligence—that makes the Time Traveller feel most at home. This points to the complexity of what defines a human. While the Time Traveller seems to insist that it is strength and intelligence that most define a human being, it is kindness and empathy that seem to cut to his heart. This will be even more apparent when the Time Traveller cannot convince himself to feel sympathy for the cruel Morlocks, even though they are stronger and smarter than the Eloi.

But gradually the truth dawned on me: that Man had not remained one species, but had differentiated into two distinct animals: that my graceful children of the Upper-world were not the sole descendants of our generation, but that this bleached, obscene, nocturnal Thing, which had flashed before me, was also heir to all the ages.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

After the Time Traveller catches a glimpse of a white ape in the darkness, he follows it to one of the mysterious wells he has seen all over the landscape. Watching it descend underground (which the Time Traveller believes, based on the aboveground network of wells and towers, to have sophisticated ventilation), he comes to the conclusion that this thing, too, is a descendant of Victorian-era humans. This is the first real rattling of the Time Traveller's hypothesis of inevitable human progress. While the Eloi seem comprehensible and benevolent, this new being makes the Time Traveller feel disgusted, and it is a disconcerting and upsetting conclusion that the human species has diverged into two. The Time Traveller's new conclusion challenges the assumption that one species of human is destined to inhabit the earth alone (as it does in the Victorian era), as well as the assumption that humans will improve, since this being seems evil. It's interesting, too, that the Time Traveller has a much easier time recognizing the benevolent Eloi as human, even though the Morlocks are equally humanoid in form. This suggests, again, that kindness plays a role in how humanity defines itself.

At first, proceeding from the problems of our own age, it seemed clear as daylight to me that the gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Labourer, was the key to the whole position.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

The Time Traveller consistently looks to explain the future society through economics, a tendency that is reflective of the dominance of economic theories in Victorian England. When he first sees the lack of houses in the future he assumes that the Eloi are communists, and now, knowing that there is an aboveground species that seems not to work, as well as an underground species, the Time Traveller makes a direct link to the economic conditions of his own era. Knowing the vast inequality between the British elite (“the Capitalist”) and the poor (“the Labourer”), the Time Traveller extrapolates that this division has morphed from a social difference to a biological one. Class-based inequality, in other words, has split the species into two: one the descendants of the poor, the other descendants of the rich. This reveals the social urgency of the whole book; Wells wants readers to understand that if class differences are not bridged, humanity could be preparing itself for a schism of a magnitude nobody could anticipate, and a dystopian future. The relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks, in other words, is a cautionary tale about social class in Victorian England.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ The nemesis of the delicate ones was creeping on apace. Ages ago, thousands of generations ago, man had thrust his brother man out of the ease and the sunshine. And now that brother was coming back—changed! Already the Eloi had begun to learn one old lesson anew. They were becoming reacquainted with Fear.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

The Time Traveller’s first interpretation of the future was that it was a stable and peaceful utopia; now he is reversing this idea in light of what he has inferred about the relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks. There is a shifting relationship between the two—the Eloi were once rulers, but now they are too feeble to keep the Morlocks at bay—and it is a relationship characterized by violence and exploitation. The Time Traveller predicts that it is the

Morlocks who are in the slow process of triumphing, and this has led the Eloi to remember a feeling that they had, perhaps, forgotten: fear. To the Time Traveller, fear is an essential feeling because it spurs action, innovation, and intelligence. He seems to think, however, that the Eloi have come to feel this fear too late. The Morlocks, having been forced to work for the Eloi for centuries, retained some of their intelligence and strength while the Eloi lost theirs. Perhaps the Time Traveller believes that, even though fear has become a part of the Eloi society again, the Eloi do not have time to improve themselves as a result of fear before the Morlocks conquer them.

☞ Still, however helpless the little people in the presence of their mysterious Fear, I was differently constituted. I came out of this age of ours, this ripe prime of the human race, when Fear does not paralyse and mystery has lost its terrors.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Eloi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

The Time Traveller sees the Eloi as helpless before their fear (their reaction to feeling afraid, to sleep in one room and stay out of the darkness, is entirely defensive), but he sees himself as differently constituted because of the age he came from. As a scientist, the Time Traveller’s instinct is to press into mystery and learn all he can despite the risks of the unknown. This approach is opposite from the Eloi, who lack curiosity or an appetite for risk. The Time Traveller also sees fear as something that has made him strong and smart. By having to navigate fear consistently (at least compared to the Eloi, he thinks) during his life in Victorian England, he has learned not to be paralyzed by it—he can continue his life and he can work to fight his fears even though he might sometimes feel afraid. It is this unique constitution that allows the Time Traveller to navigate this unknown world and learn enough to eventually save his own life. This corroborates the Time Traveller’s belief that the Eloi have doomed themselves by adapting to easy lives.

☛ And during these few revolutions all the activity, all the traditions, the complex organizations, the nations, languages, literatures, aspirations, even the mere memory of Man as I knew him, had been swept out of existence. Instead were these frail creatures who had forgotten their high ancestry, and the white Things of which I went in terror.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the book, the Time Traveller no longer feels at all proud of the utopian achievements of future humans. He knows now that class divisions have caused humanity to decay into two inferior species. As he looks at the stars (now so old that their patterns are unrecognizable), he mourns all of the effort and achievement of the past that has been lost as a result of this decay. The Eloi and Morlocks, all that remain of the vast and proud human tradition, are either stupid or evil. This is a moment of profound loss for the Time Traveller who, as a scientist, dedicates his life to the advancement of knowledge and technology in order to, ideally, better the future. So this moment not only points to the futility of human life and history overall, but also to the specific futility of the Time Traveller's own life and passion for science. It's an insult to him that after all of the centuries of human advancement and all of the effort put into solving problems and gaining knowledge, he now must live in terror of a humanoid creature that is weaker and less intelligent than he is.

☛ Then I tried to preserve myself from the horror that was coming upon me by regarding it as a rigorous punishment of human selfishness. Man had been content to live in ease and delight upon the labours of his fellow-man, had taken Necessity as his watchword and excuse, and in the fullness of time Necessity had come home to him. I even tried a Carlyle-like scorn of this wretched aristocracy in decay. But this attitude of mind was impossible. However great their intellectual degradation, the Eloi had kept too much of the human form not to claim my sympathy, and to make me performe a sharer in their degradation and their Fear.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Once the Time Traveller realizes that the Morlocks are cannibals and that the Eloi's great fear of them is the result of their worry that the Morlocks will eat them, he is gripped by an unprecedented horror at what has become of mankind. He acknowledges that this cannibalism is the result of human adaptations to prolonged inequality and he tries to even justify cannibalism to himself this way. If the Eloi forced the Morlocks to toil underground in order to keep the Eloi comfortable for centuries, then perhaps the Eloi becoming the prey of the Morlocks is a sort of Karmic justice for centuries of Morlock suffering. However, the Time Traveller remains unconvinced by this logic. Despite the fact that the Eloi are helpless and stupid, he identifies with them because they seem to him more human than the Morlocks. This isn't because the Eloi are more intelligent (they're not), but because they're kind and sympathetic—and they simply *look* more human than the Morlocks. Aside from the Time Traveller's aesthetic preference, this is the most powerful argument for kindness as being definitive of the thing contemporary humans recognize as "humanness" or "humanity," even though the Time Traveller has previously tried to argue for the definitive quality being intelligence.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ I saw an inscription in some unknown character. I thought, rather foolishly, that Weena might help me to interpret this, but I only learned that the bare idea of writing had never entered her head. She always seemed to me, I fancy, more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), Weena

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

The more the Time Traveller learns about the world of the future, the less he is able to rely on his notion of intelligence being definitive of human beings. The Time Traveller is repeatedly disappointed that the Eloi are no help to him in finding the time machine because they are so weak, stupid, and uncurious. Weena occupies a complex role, however, because she gives the Time Traveller friendship and

comfort, which are important to his ability to keep up morale despite hardship and fear. This quote displays the Time Traveller's ambivalence about how to categorize Weena—he thinks of her as being human because she shows affection and sympathy, but here he walks that categorization back in light of her lack of sophistication. He seems to be reminding himself that Weena is not like him because she lacks intelligence, even though the two of them have developed a genuine friendship. This again underscores the complexity of classifying what a human essentially is.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ I understood now what the beauty of the Over-world people covered. Very pleasant was their day, as pleasant as the day of the cattle in the field. Like the cattle, they knew of no enemies and provided against no needs. And their end was the same.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Eloi

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

The more the Time Traveller learns about the relationship between the Eloi and the Morlocks, the darker and more complex his ideas about the future society become. He had first understood the peacefulness of the Eloi as utopian, then as exploitative, and then as naïve in the face of the coming danger from the Morlocks. At this moment he ponders the idea that the Morlocks might be more in control of the Eloi than he previously thought, keeping their lives simple and easy in order to essentially grow them as livestock and eat them. The beauty of the Eloi is now corrupted for the Time Traveller—it's simply a mask for a reality that is unimaginably dark. This passage suggests, too, that one consistent thread among all humans is a propensity for exploitation: first the Victorian rich exploiting the poor, then the Eloi exploiting the Morlocks, and now the Morlocks exploiting the Eloi. This points to a much more violent and evil picture of humanity than the Time Traveller, who thinks of Weena as human because of her goodness, has been willing to accept.

☞ It is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger, and trouble. An animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism. Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless. There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change. Only those animals partake of intelligence that have to meet a huge variety of needs and dangers. So, as I see it, the Upper-world man had drifted towards his feeble prettiness, and the Under-world to mere mechanical industry.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker), The Morlocks, The Eloi

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the Time Traveller's most lucid explanations of how he thinks natural selection has created these two races of people. Victorian humans were (relatively) smart and strong because they had to contend with adversity. Perversely, the Victorian elite's strength and cunning allowed them to create a society where other people's labor ensured that elites never faced adversity, which caused them to degenerate into a race that could be conquered by the very people who once served them. While Victorian elites often considered themselves to be genetically superior to the poor, Wells defies this explanation, suggesting that in the long view of history, genetics are malleable and power and "superiority" shift. The elites ruled the poor, in other words, because of circumstance and not biological superiority—thus, circumstance was then able to take them down. This is also another powerful argument for fear as a productive feeling, rather than solely a negative and destructive one. While many people would wish for a life free from fear, Wells argues that without fear we would cease to be recognizably human.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ So I travelled, stopping ever and again, in great strides of a thousand years or more, drawn on by the mystery of the earth's fate, watching with a strange fascination the sun grow larger and duller in the westward sky, and the life of the old earth ebb away.

Related Characters: The Time Traveller (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

After the Time Traveller escapes from the Morlocks, he accidentally sends the time machine into the future instead of back to his home in the past. Ever curious, he keeps going despite his mistake, wanting further knowledge about the fate of the earth. This passage makes clear, again, the human place in the scale of history—the Time Traveller is moving so fast into the future that human presence is irrelevant or even absent, and natural processes are the only visible phenomena. Wells also bases many aspects of his time travel passages on physics and planetary science—the constellations, as far as we know, really will be unrecognizable in the future, the sun will expand but weaken, the planet will cool, and the air will thin. Thus, just as Wells' vision of the Eloi and Morlocks is grounded in Victorian social structure, his vision of the future of the earth is grounded in a Victorian understanding (much of which is still applicable) of the future of the planet. This is a work of futuristic science fiction, but it is thoroughly rooted in contemporary knowledge and norms.

Epilogue Quotes

☝ Or did he go forward, into one of the nearer ages, in which men are still men, but with the riddles of our own time answered and its wearisome problems solved? Into the manhood of the race: for I, for my own part, cannot think that these latter days of weak experiment, fragmentary theory, and mutual discord are indeed man's culminating time!

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Time Traveller

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Before the Time Traveller witnessed the future, his beliefs were much like the narrator's: he thought humans would advance indefinitely and solve the pressing problems of Victorian society. As the Time Traveller becomes disillusioned, his view of humanity adjusts accordingly, becoming bleaker and bleaker and then downright pessimistic. Though the narrator knows and respects why this would be, he cannot himself share the view that his own time, full of violence and strife, is the pinnacle of humanity. This underscores two cognitive and cultural biases that

Wells is interested in throughout the book: that progress is linear (efforts to solve problems will create a better world, and knowledge will always expand) and that human beings are essentially good. The narrator's folly here is a sad ending to the book. The Time Traveller has likely sacrificed his life in order to tell a story that could have profound social consequences for the Victorian era. Were the elites at the Time Traveller's dinner party to take his tale to heart, they might be able to effect that kind of social change that could prevent the human race from splitting in two and decaying. However, because even the narrator (the only one to believe the Time Traveller at all) falls victim to these cognitive biases, he is unable to confront the truth of the future and therefore he is powerless before it.

☝ And I have before me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers—shriveled now, and brown and flat and brittle—to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Eloi, Weena

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator, having expressed his discomfort with the darker implications of the Time Traveller's tale of the future (cannibalism, social inequality, loss of knowledge and culture), chooses to focus on the fact that he has Weena's flowers for comfort. These flowers symbolize the gestures of kindness and sympathy that made the Time Traveller feel at home in the future—they are, in a sense, symbolic of the only redeeming aspect of the future of the human race. In one sense, this is an argument for kindness as a fundamental human quality and it gives hope for the future of humanity. On the other hand, though, it's just this kind of selective logic (choosing to focus on the good instead of the bad, and not striving for the whole picture) that gets the human race in trouble to begin with. The very conclusion that the narrator makes, which is essentially "at least there are nice people in the dystopian future," is exemplary of a kind of thinking opposite of the Time Traveller's, who is always looking to readjust his worldview to fit his observations. In this sense, then, the ending is both a slight bit of optimism—that not all humanity will die out even in a

dystopian future—and a bleak conclusion for that same future, indicating that humans are not as rational and

capable as they think they are.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The book opens on the narrator at a dinner party of well-educated, upper-class professionals and specialists, including his friend, an eminent scientist whom he calls the Time Traveller. The Time Traveller is describing to his guests principles of science and math, including the notion that time (or “duration”) is a traversable dimension just like length or width. This builds up to an explanation of how time travel might be possible. The assembled guests react with skepticism and excitement, finally demanding that the Time Traveller prove to them that he has actually created a mechanism for traveling in time.

The Time Traveller goes to his laboratory and returns with a small model of a machine made of metal and ivory. The group of dinner guests examines it to be sure it’s not a trick, and the Time Traveller points out that one of the bars is glimmering as though it is only partially there. The Time Traveller points to a lever and says that when he presses it the machine will disappear into the future. A skeptical guest insists that he depress the lever himself, and when he does, the machine disappears. The only person not stunned is the Time Traveller.

The Time Traveller then reveals that he has nearly finished building a life-size version of the model in his laboratory, and that it will allow him to make his own voyage in time. He leads the still-skeptical guests to his laboratory, where they observe a larger version of the machine that just disappeared. Despite the machine parts, blueprints, and the spectacle they have just witnessed, the guests still seem not to believe the Time Traveller, who swears that he has never been more serious about anything in his life.

The opening introduces scientific and mathematical concepts that don't themselves add up to explaining how time travel is possible, but are meant to give readers a taste of the complexity of the concept. By highlighting the intellect and ambition of the Time Traveller, Wells is deliberately setting up a contrast to the humanlike species of the future who have degenerated almost past recognition. It's important to note, too, the social class of the assembled guests. The Time Traveller, an important scientist, is wealthy, successful, and well-educated, and so are his guests. This implicates the Time Traveller in the class-related violence that the book will soon explore.



Here, Wells imagines a scenario that could begin to overcome an educated person's doubts about time travel. This underscores that the Time Traveller's guests are educated and skeptical, but it also is a rhetorical device to allow the reader to suspend his or her own disbelief. In addition, the notion of testing a model time machine in public resonates with the Time Traveller's consistent commitment to the scientific process. He is always testing his ideas and then readjusting them to fit what happens, just like the scientific method.



Even though a reader is not likely to believe in the possibility of time travel, Wells' choice to have the dinner guests remain skeptical of the endeavor encourages readers to be on the Time Traveller's side, which is essential to their emotional investment in the book. It's also notable that the Time Traveller seems unconcerned that his guests don't believe him. As a scientist, he is not interested in convincing people—he wants to show them proof, which he's confident he can do soon.



CHAPTER 2

The narrator reflects that nobody believed the Time Traveller at the time because he was considered to be too clever, or not serious enough, to be credible. However, none of the dinner guests could get the notion out of their minds, and none forgot the disappearance of the model. The narrator receives another dinner invitation from the Time Traveller for the next Thursday, and, of course, he goes.

When the narrator arrives at the Time Traveller's house, one of the dinner guests is holding a note from the Time Traveller asking the guests to proceed with dinner, and saying that he will explain why he is late once he arrives. As they sit down to dinner, one guest skeptically explains what happened with the model time machine to the guests who weren't there the previous week. In the midst of this explanation, the Time Traveller limps through the doorway, looking dirty, beat-up, and upset. He tells the guests that he is going to wash up and change and then he will explain what happened to him.

While the Time Traveller is washing up, his guests speculate about what has happened to him, generally mocking the notion that he could actually have been time traveling. The Time Traveller returns and eats vigorously before telling the guests that he will tell the story, but only if there are no arguments or interruptions because he is so exhausted. The guests agree, and the Time Traveller admits that what he says will sound like a lie, but he claims it is the absolute truth.

This passage makes clear that, while the Time Traveller belongs to the British upper class, he doesn't entirely fit in with his fellow elites. The others disbelieve the Time Traveller not just because time travel is an unbelievable concept, but because they consider him to be odd and eccentric. This shows the rigidity of social expectations in Victorian England.



The Time Traveller has assembled a room full of elites to be present once he returns from time travelling. This is even more obvious than the previous week—everyone in the room is influential and highly educated. The guests include a journalist and an editor, people who can tell his story, and a doctor and a psychologist, who, since they are trained in science, could credibly verify his account. It seems that the Time Traveller has assembled these skeptics in order that his adventures might become known and spread.



The Time Traveller, who proves himself to be rigorously committed to questioning and re-assessing his ideas based on evidence, must be very tired in order to ask his guests not to question his account. This lends an urgency to the tale he is about to tell. The Time Traveller's concession that he knows his story will sound like a lie shows that he is now concerned (unlike last week) with whether others believe him—showing the importance of what he is about to say.



CHAPTER 3

The Time Traveller says that he finished his time machine the previous week and immediately decided to try it. When he pulled the lever, he felt a sensation of falling and noticed the clock had moved a few hours into the future. He then pulled the lever in earnest and saw days waxing and waning faster and faster. Eventually he was no longer indoors—the laboratory, he supposed, had been destroyed. Then he was moving so fast that the movement of night and day merged into a perpetual greyness. The unpleasant feelings of time travel fell away and the Time Traveller felt exhilarated until he became overcome by curiosity about the world. Despite his worry about accidentally materializing inside a solid object, he pulls the lever and stops the machine.

The passages in which Wells describes time travel are some of the most impactful reminders in the book of the miniscule length of a human life in the scale of geologic time. While the Time Traveller is moving through time, the only things permanent enough for him to notice are natural processes, like the movement of the sun, or structures and landforms, which, if the time machine is slow enough, come and go on a scale that is observable. This dwarfs the human presence on the earth and puts into perspective our impermanence. The Time Traveller's combination of fear and wonder emphasize the theme that intellect must be sharpened through desire, fear, ambition, and risk.



It is the year 802,701, and the Time Traveller finds himself in a garden of strange **flowers**, near a large Sphinx-like statue made of white stone. For the first time the Time Traveller considers the future of man with fear rather than excitement—what if people are crueler now than they were? What if they are distorted and inhuman? The Time Traveller then sees a group of figures in robes looking at him from a window in a nearby building. Another group approaches him, and he notices that they're smaller than he is and wearing simple robes and sandals. They strike him as being frail—"like a consumptive," Wells writes.

Up until this point, the Time Traveller has operated under a common assumption: that mankind will advance indefinitely, and future humans will be stronger, smarter, and better than those of the present. This is the beginning of the Time Traveller's disillusionment with this unscientific and naïve belief, and it foreshadows the depravity and degeneration he will find.



CHAPTER 4

One of the frail beings looks at the Time Traveller and smiles, and the Time Traveller is taken by the being's lack of fear. After the being makes some sounds that seem to be its language, the Time Traveller realizes that they cannot communicate. All of the creatures begin to touch him to make sure he is real, and the Time Traveller feels surprised that this is not at all threatening. The beings seem friendly, and, besides, they are so frail that he knows he could throw them off of him if he needed to.

The Time Traveller encounters the new beings cautiously, but is immediately put at ease by their apparent trust and benevolence. The Time Traveller considers them to be possible threats to himself—why wouldn't he?—but he seems charmed by the fact that these beings have no similar fear of him. This, at first, seems like a good development for the future of mankind.



The Time Traveller unscrews the levers from his time machine but leaves the frame in the garden. He examines the beings more closely and notices that they don't seem as interested in him as he had expected, and they have made no effort to communicate. The Time Traveller then realizes that these beings are not very smart—perhaps at the level of a five year old child—and he is sorely disappointed and surprised that mankind has not advanced in the hundreds of thousands of years since his own time. The Time Traveller gestures to indicate that he has come from the sun, and the beings begin to drape him in lovely **flowers**.

Since the beings showed him so much trust and kindness, the Time Traveller feels enough at ease to leave his time machine unattended—a cautionary tale about the perils of not feeling adequate fear. The Time Traveller's quick realization of the intellectual inferiority of future humans is the first indication that all is not well in this new future. The description of the beings draping the Time Traveller with flowers is at once mocking and sweet. These beings are silly and helpless, but their kindness is apparent.



The beings lead the Time Traveller to a large building in which there are exotic **flowers**, fruits, and bushes, and an even larger group of the beings. The Time Traveller sits with the beings on cushions on the metal floor and feasts on the strange fruits. As he eats, the Time Traveller glances around the building and notices how dilapidated it is. The Time Traveller remarks, retrospectively, that these people were vegetarians, and cattle, sheep, pigs, and other animals had become extinct.

This passage reflects more on the changes of several hundred thousand years. The beings are humanlike but not quite human, the fruits are recognizable as fruits but still unfamiliar, and livestock is now extinct. This all points to Wells' engagement with Darwin's theory of natural selection, which he references both directly and indirectly throughout the book. Here, Wells makes it clear to readers that this future is a direct evolution of the era in which the Time Traveller lives.



The Time Traveller decides to learn the language, and, through gestures, begins by asking the beings to name fruits. He notes that his language lessons had to be short because the beings would tire quickly. "I never met people more indolent or more easily fatigued," he observes. Once again, the Time Traveller remarks on the surprising lack of interest that all these beings show in him.

The Time Traveller here demonstrates his signature curiosity and ambition—he wants to learn a strange language, and persists despite the reticence of his teachers. The Time Traveller's commitment and intellect is a striking contrast to the laziness and lack of interest shown by the beings, making them again seem less than human.



The Time Traveller explores the landscape, trying to observe the details and make sense of them to determine what kind of society he has encountered. He finds some ruins, and then realizes that there are no individual houses: "the single house, and possibly even the household, had vanished," which he takes to mean that the beings are communists. Supporting this belief, he realizes that everyone is dressed alike and even their features resemble one another, regardless of whether they are male or female.

That the Time Traveller is wandering around trying to collect observations and make sense of them reflects his scientific background, but it's interesting that his first major observations are not about science, but about economics. The absence of households leads him to conclude that the beings are communists, which says more about the Time Traveller's own era than it does about the future (he will later, as a good scientist should, adjust this assessment to fit new observations).



Noting the ease of the lives these beings lead, the Time Traveller remarks that it seemed only natural that distinctions between the sexes and the distinctions of individual families, which he sees as "necessities of an age of physical force," would disappear. He reflects that these people must be the end products of the increasing ease in the Time Traveller's own time with which people could meet their basic needs. He then remarks on how far this initial hypothesis is from the reality he later uncovered.

In Victorian England social class was paramount, so it makes sense that the Time Traveller would begin his inquiry into the new society by remarking on their lack of social hierarchy or even differentiation. The Time Traveller's approval of the loss of class distinctions shows him to be troubled by the inequality that characterized his own era, and he is nearly willing to overlook these new beings' stupidity and weakness when he considers that it might be a result of having solved the most pressing social problems of his time.



Reflecting on the landscape from a hilltop, the Time Traveller assembles his initial reflection on this society he has encountered. It is humanity "upon the wane," he determines. The Time Traveller considers the paradox that, in his own time, the goal of society has been to make life easier and meet people's needs, but that kind of security also breeds a kind of feebleness that characterizes the humanlike beings he has encountered, which he considers emblematic of the "sunset of mankind."

Despite his excitement about the equality and ease of this society, the Time Traveller determines that this is not a species that is thriving or improving—these creatures are evidence (to the Time Traveller, at least) that humanity is withering.



The beings seem to be living an idyllic and easy life, in harmony with one another and the natural world, but the Time Traveller feels bittersweet about this society, even though it seems to be the realization of all the dreams of the Time Traveller's own era. He reflects that entropy is the natural process of energy, and that, without struggles to sharpen human effort and intellect, it decays even to the point where there is no art. Even so, he thinks, why should there be strength and intellect when all of mankind's problems have been solved? And then the Time Traveller retrospectively reflects that his explanation of this society was simple, and also very wrong.

The Time Traveller's ambivalence about this idyllic and degenerate future shows his dueling values: does he prefer the kind of humanity that shares his curiosity and passion, or does he prefer a kind of humanity that is peaceful and placated? He seems to think that both cannot be true at once, positing that either humans must struggle and therefore maintain intellect, or live in peace and harmony and lose their unique capabilities. This mirrors many economic theories popular in the late nineteenth century, notably the debates over whether society was better served by free-market capitalism or a regulatory state.



CHAPTER 5

Darkness descends and the Time Traveller returns from the hills to find a place to sleep. As he approaches the garden with the Sphinx statue, he realizes that his time machine is gone. Panicking that he is stranded in this strange future, the Time Traveller runs around looking for the machine, all the while knowing intuitively that it has been hidden somewhere.

It's ironic that the Time Traveller criticized the beings for their trust and stupidity, when the Time Traveller's own lack of appropriate caution leads the time machine to be stolen.



The most unsettling aspect of the time machine being hidden is that the Time Traveller knows that the beings he met do not have the physical strength or intellectual curiosity to move the machine, so some unknown power must have done it. In a frenzy, the Time Traveller runs through the bushes, catches a glimpse of a small white being that looks like a deer, and then storms into the large building where the beings sleep. He wakes the beings up and some of them laugh while others seem frightened. Not wanting to revive the feeling of fear, which the Time Traveller assumes has been long forgotten among these people, he leaves the building and has his tantrum outdoors, where he feels himself touching strange beings while he cries in the **darkness**.

This passage shows the complexity of the role of fear in the book. Lack of fear seems to have made the beings helpless, and The Time Traveller believes that inciting the beings' fear could be dangerous, because he doesn't know how they act when afraid. Still, it is the Time Traveller's own fear and panic that leads him to do an irrational and even ill-advised thing in waking the beings up and scaring them. If fear really is central to preserving human capabilities (like intelligence and curiosity), then it is also, paradoxically, an unpredictable force that can cause people to behave irrationally and dangerously.



When **day breaks**, the Time Traveller feels more rational, and he decides to find the hiding place of the time machine. He uselessly questions the beings, and when they cannot answer him he has the impulse to hurt them, though he acknowledges that this is foolish. Some grooves in the grass where the time machine had landed direct the Time Traveller to the Sphinx statue, and he becomes convinced that the time machine has been hidden behind a hollow panel in the pedestal, though he cannot open the panel to retrieve it.

The Time Traveller's impulse to hurt the humanlike beings is one that he knows is irrational and wrong. The fact that he feels it, though, nods to the fact that even a human so intelligent and sophisticated as the Time Traveller still has brutal and animalistic impulses. This passage highlights the contradictions in the Time Traveller's psyche: on the one hand, he wants to resort to animal violence, and on the other, he is interpreting a set of complex clues to determine the location of his missing time machine.



Two of the beings approach him and he gestures to the panel to see if they can open it, but they behave oddly, as though the Time Traveller is being rude. He asks several more beings, who give the same response, and in anger he grabs one of them and drags him back to the pedestal. The being seems terrified and disgusted. Then the Time Traveller beats on the panel and thinks he hears a chuckle come from inside. After hammering the panel with a rock, the Time Traveller finally gives up and decides that the better strategy is to figure out how to retrieve the time machine by learning the ways of the society in which he has found himself.

The Time Traveller returns to the large building and feels that the beings are avoiding him, though after a few days they returned to normal. The Time Traveller begins to pass his days learning the language, which he realizes is extraordinarily simple, and exploring the landscape. In the course of his explorations he discovers that the landscape is dotted with what look like wells, though there is no sign of water in them. The wells, the Time Traveller realizes, are connected to the tall towers that appear here and there on the hills, which leads him to surmise that the wells and towers are an elaborate ventilation system for something underground.

The Time Traveller begins to realize that his explanation that this society has all its needs automatically met was unsatisfactory (for example, their clothes always looked fresh but there was no sign that anyone would mend them if they tore). There was no machinery, appliances, or workshops, but the Time Traveller remarks that their sandals must have been made by someone. The Time Traveller wonders, once again, who could have taken his time machine and why.

The same day, while watching the beings bathe in the river, The Time Traveller notices one of them drowning. He rescues her, and afterwards she attaches herself to him, adorning him with **flowers** to express her gratitude. Her name, he learns, is Weena, and she seems to him childlike but benevolent. She follows him everywhere from then on, except when she is too tired to continue walking with him. She cries in despair every time he leaves her, and her love for him, he observes, begins to make this new world feel like home.

The Time Traveller has expounded at length about how these beings are stupid and irrational because they lack fear and are never challenged in their lives. However, the Time Traveller, presented here with a frustrating obstacle, does not (as we might expect based on his rhetoric) immediately rise to the challenge and find a rational way to cope with it. He is intermittently furious and violent, which complicates the validity of his own beliefs on the value of fear and frustration, although he does eventually take the approach of finding the time machine through gathering knowledge.



This is another example of the Time Traveller encountering the world through intellect and curiosity. His observations about the infrastructural components of the future allow him to make a reasonably good guess about the function of various structures, which is an act of intelligence that the beings of the future could never perform. The realization that the language of the future beings is very simple compounds the Time Traveller's sense that the future has been one of extreme intellectual decay.



As the Time Traveller spends more time in the future, he realizes that his initial ideas about this future society do not hold up to his more fine-tuned observations. This process of forming a hypothesis and then testing it through observation and then forming a new hypothesis based on the new observations is an exact mirror of the scientific method.



Thus far, the Time Traveller has not had much of a personal relationship with the beings of the future, and his observations of them have been rather clinical instead of emotional. But by saving Weena (an act of kindness), and through Weena's reciprocal kindness and gratitude, the Time Traveller develops an emotional connection to her. Their mutual kindness and identifiable friendship makes the beings seem more human than before, suggesting that kindness and emotion are, in addition to intelligence and curiosity, integral characteristics of humanity.



Weena's behavior makes the Time Traveller understand that fear is still a presence in this society. Weena is afraid, in particular, of all kinds of **darkness**, and this leads the Time Traveller to observe that all of the beings seem to be afraid of the dark. The Time Traveller remarks that he did not learn the lesson of this fear yet—while the beings all gather together to sleep, the Time Traveller continues to sleep outdoors by himself, even though he had awakened once with the feeling that something was touching him.

The morning that he awakened with something touching him, the Time Traveller recalls, was before he met Weena. He had seen a grey being dash away, and he looked towards the hills and thought he saw ghosts, or something that looked like a white ape. He pushed this from his mind for a while, until he could no longer.

One morning the Time Traveller is seeking shelter from the heat, and he finds in a ruin a chamber that is dark and cool. When he enters, he sees a pair of eyes watching him. The Time Traveller immediately connects this with the pervasive fear of the **dark** in this society, but he moves towards the being anyway. As it runs away he notices that it looks like a small white ape.

The Time Traveller follows the ape into the **darkness** and feels around until he finds one of the wells he had observed before. He lights a match to see if the ape had descended the shaft, and he sees it moving deeper into the darkness. The sight of it makes him shudder, and, for this reason, he resists the conclusion that he must ultimately make: these apes are human.

From this experience, the Time Traveller concludes that the human race has evolved into two separate species: the beings he knows, and these underground creatures. This leads him to wonder what the interconnection is between the two species. He knows that in order to understand he must descend into the well.

Through his closeness with Weena, the Time Traveller is able to make even more fine-tuned observations about this future society. He learns from her that the beings are afraid of the dark, but (perhaps out of condescension) he does not take that fear seriously. This is another example of the Time Traveller, someone who values fear, not exhibiting adequate caution to keep himself safe.



While the Time Traveller was not able to put together the evidence of the Morlocks (the creatures he is now seeing) at the time, he can see the clues he missed in retrospect. His willingness to admit to his failure of observation is also an important part of the scientific method.



This is a moment in which the Time Traveller must decide whether to respect his curiosity or fear more, and he chooses curiosity. He is rewarded for this in that he learns what the being looks like by moving towards it. Throughout the book, Wells shows that gaining new knowledge always involves risk.



While the Time Traveller immediately recognized the kind, peaceful beings as human, it takes him longer to accept this conclusion about the apes. This, along with the Time Traveller's initial assumption that this society had solved the social problems of the past, reflects the Time Traveller's bias towards a positive view of humanity. In order to truly understand what is happening in the future, he must overcome this assumption and acknowledge that depravity and kindness are both inherent to humanity.



While the picture of this society that is emerging has gotten much darker, the Time Traveller is still committed to learning the full truth through observation, a process that he knows will put him at risk. That his curiosity never wavers shows his true commitment to science.



The Time Traveller returns to Weena without entering the well that day, but he continues to puzzle over the creatures until he realizes their economic significance. Before revealing it, the Time Traveller backtracks to explain that the appearance of the creatures, particularly their large eyes, makes him think they are unable to see in the **light**—they have evolved to be solely subterranean. This leads to the conclusion that there is a whole society underground, one that does all the work to make the above-ground beings' lives so comfortable.

The connection is then made to the Time Traveller's own era—the above-ground beings are the descendants of the ruling class of the Time Traveller's society, and the underground beings are the working class. A difference that was once purely social, the Time Traveller surmises, has now caused the species to diverge in two. The Time Traveller reflects on the fact that many laborers in his era work in shadowed spaces and live without much natural **light**, while the rich seek estates that are more and more remote from others—the divergence along class lines makes sense in a way that is horrifying.

This changes the way the Time Traveller thinks of the society he has encountered. While he once referred to it as a Golden Age because of its peace and prosperity, he now understands that the above-ground beings live as well as they do through exploitation of those living underground. The Time Traveller warns that this explanation could still be wrong, but it is the most plausible one he found. He then reveals the names of the two species: the Morlocks live below ground, and the Eloi above.

CHAPTER 6

The Time Traveller begins sleeping indoors with the Eloi because he, too, has become afraid of the Morlocks. Even so, he understands that he can only retrieve the time machine by descending into the well and learning what there is to be learned. Trying to steel his nerves, he walks farther and farther into the country and he sees in the distance a large green structure that seems made of porcelain. It is different enough in shape and size to suggest that it has a different use than any other structure he has seen.

The next morning, the Time Traveller resolves to descend into one of the wells. Weena runs after him, and when he leaves her at the mouth of the well she is agonized and frightened. Nonetheless, he climbs down quickly into the **darkness** and finds a chamber built into the wall that he enters in order to rest his arms.

The Time Traveller continues to refine his observations, surprising himself when he realizes that the underground beings do the work that enables the above-ground beings to live so comfortably. This is a very different conclusion than his initial one, that technology had somehow enabled a life without needs. This passage suggests that technology alone cannot solve human problems, and cannot correct human tendencies toward selfishness and cruelty.



This is the first full glimpse Wells gives of the connection between Victorian England and the society of the future—the rigidity of Victorian class distinctions combined with natural selection has turned the human race into two different species, and, even thousands of years in the future, the descendants of the poor are still being exploited. This casts a pall over the notion that the above-ground beings are inherently peaceful and kind, and shows how entrenched Victorian class distinctions seemed to Wells.



While the Time Traveller tends to prefer to focus on the positive aspects of humanity (intelligence, kindness, curiosity, etc.), he has a harder time grappling with the negative characteristics that are also inextricable from human nature. At this point, the Time Traveller can no longer ignore that the society he has encountered has not solved the social problems of his own time, but has rather exacerbated them cruelly.



The Time Traveller finally understands the danger of the Morlocks and is allowing his fear to keep him safe, though he knows he will have to confront it eventually. The porcelain building, as it is something new, piques the Time Traveller's curiosity, since he needs to amass knowledge in order to get the time machine back.



The Time Traveller is now confronting his fear of the Morlocks in order to find information about them that might help him retrieve the time machine. This is another example of the risks required for the pursuit of knowledge and for the advancement of science and culture.



The Time Traveller is awakened by the feeling of something touching his face, and he quickly strikes a match to be able to see what it is—there are three Morlocks who immediately flee the **light** of the match. The Time Traveller notices that they are likely afraid of the light, as their eyes have probably not evolved to meet it comfortably. Feeling his way into another room, the Time Traveller notices the sounds of machines getting louder. When he strikes a match he sees large machines and Morlocks flocking around them. The Time Traveller also smells blood; when he sees that the Morlocks are eating a corpse, he realizes that they're carnivorous.

His match goes out, and the Time Traveller suddenly realizes he only has a few matches left, which are his only weapon against the Morlocks. In the **darkness** something touches his face and picks at his clothing. When the Time Traveller shouts it goes away and then comes back more intensely. It's clear that multiple Morlocks are clutching at him. He lights a match and escapes through its **light**, needing to strike all of his remaining matches to reach the well shaft without the Morlocks catching him. He climbs to safety, and Weena is waiting for him at the surface.

CHAPTER 7

The Time Traveller feels a sense of impending doom when he realizes that the obstacle to returning to his own era is not simply the stupidity of the Eloi, but the inhuman malevolence of the Morlocks. This sense is compounded by the coming of the new moon, which means that the nights will be pure **darkness** and the surface will be wholly vulnerable to the Morlocks.

The Time Traveller reflects that while for thousands of years the Eloi must have been the rulers, the old order was slipping. The only reason the Morlocks hadn't yet claimed the surface is that their eyes could not adjust, but their strength, intelligence, and ambition was superior to the Eloi, and the Morlocks' eventual rule was inevitable. Knowing this, the Time Traveller determines to arm himself so that he might sleep without being vulnerable in the **darkness**.

This is the Time Traveller's first real glimpse into the Morlocks' life, which is, importantly, also the future of the British working class. It's not pleasant—they live underground in factories that smell like blood, and they're scared of the light. This crystallizes the differences between the idyllic lives of the Eloi and the difficult lives of the Morlocks, and it also foreshadows the main source of the Eloi's fear.



The matches, which were initially simply a tool of discovery (illuminating the subterranean world so that he could learn about the Morlocks), are now a weapon against the Morlocks. This is another example of the duality of technology—it can be used simply for discovery and advancement, but it can also do harm. That technology is only as good as the people using it can be seen as one of the morals of this book.



The Time Traveller, who once thought of the year 802,701 as utopian, is now forced to confront that humans have become both stupider and, in the case of the Morlocks, more evil, essentially because technology stranded and embittered them. Even so, he needs technology (the time machine) to get home.



The Time Traveller now knows enough about this world that he can project a historical narrative both backwards (Victorian social classes evolved into Morlocks and Eloi), and forwards to predict that the Morlocks will overtake the Eloi to rule the earth. This essentially means that evil defeats good, and the working class finally gets its revenge on the rich for their exploitation—but only after the working class itself has degenerated to an inhuman level.



In order to search for materials that might be helpful against the Morlocks, the Time Traveller decides to look inside the green porcelain building he had seen before. He sets off with Weena, but soon realizes the distance is greater than he thought, and it is past **sunset** when he first glimpses the building on the horizon. Throughout the journey Weena had been filling his pockets with **flowers**, the Time Traveller recalls. The Time Traveller, breaking his narrative, pulls two flowers from his pockets and places them on the table in front of his dinner guests. Then he resumes telling his story.

As **darkness** falls, Weena becomes frightened and tired and the Time Traveller has to carry her. He comes to a thick wood and decides that the danger of crossing it in the darkness is too great, so he sits on the hillside, waiting for the moon to come up. As he waits, he looks at the constellations and reflects on the trajectory of mankind—during the hundreds of thousands of years he has traveled the sky has changed, human culture has become extinct, and what's left are the Eloi and the Morlocks. He realizes suddenly that the Morlocks eat the Eloi.

The Time Traveller barely sleeps that night, and in the morning he and Weena traverse the wood. While they walk he reflects on what has led the Morlocks to eat the Eloi, who are their evolutionary relatives. He surmises that at a certain point the Morlocks ran out of their food source and they were forced to turn to the Eloi. Meanwhile they must have lost, over the years, the cultural taboo against cannibalism. The Time Traveller remarks that this taboo is not a deep-rooted instinct in humans of his own era, but a mere cultural prejudice. Still, in order to stave off his horror, the Time Traveller tries to think about the cannibalism as retribution for the Eloi's selfishness, a natural punishment for the thousands of generations of labor exploitation. Despite this effort, the Time Traveller cannot help but sympathize with the Eloi, as they have better preserved the human form, which, of course, is the Time Traveller's own.

The Time Traveller then lays out his objectives for the green building: he needs a place of refuge, some metal or stone weapons, a way to make fire, and a tool that will allow him to open the metal panels on the Sphinx statue. He says he will bring Weena back to his own time once he has retrieved the time machine.

Weena has been the Time Traveller's constant companion and his only source of humanlike compassion and friendship. Her placing flowers in his pocket is an act of kindness that comforts the Time Traveller on his risky journey. Though the Eloi are lazy and Weena tires easily, she has shown unusual stamina (for an Eloi) in following after the Time Traveller, which suggests that there is some truth to the Time Traveller's observation that it is only through being challenged that humans improve.



Every so often the Time Traveller reflects on the futility of the human endeavor, and this time it is a consideration of how much culture and effort has been lost over the millennia. It's a horrifying realization that after all of the cultural achievements—language, science, art—of contemporary humans, all that is left are the helpless Eloi and the Morlocks, whom the Time Traveller suddenly understands to be cannibals. Wells' vision of the future continues to get bleaker.



The Time Traveller often tries to parse what is deeply rooted in human nature and what is simply cultural conditioning. He wonders about fear, first thinking it has disappeared and then realizing that it is still innate. He wonders similarly about kindness, which has endured in one species but not the other. The taboo against cannibalism is a powerful one in the Time Traveller's era—one that might even seem to be a defining trait of contemporary humans—but even that proves not to be inherent to the species. Perhaps the lesson here is that the human qualities that endure are simply those that are evolutionarily advantageous, and it is not useful to cling to traits like intelligence and strength as being definitive of human beings, since they could disappear if the circumstances were right. Despite his attempt to view evolutionary changes as neutral facts, the Time Traveller still finds himself sympathetic to the species that is more recognizably human.



The Time Traveller now has all the knowledge he needs to get his time machine back, and his attention has thus turned away from observation and towards action.



CHAPTER 8

When Weena and the Time Traveller reach the Palace of Green Porcelain, they realize that it is dilapidated. It's immediately clear that the building was once a museum, as there are skeletons of extinct creatures on display. The Time Traveller finds some display cases that seem to be airtight, since their contents are so well preserved. Exploring other galleries in the building, the Time Traveller finds minerals and machines, stirring his imagination for how he could use such materials against the Morlocks.

In the gallery with the machines, Weena's fear makes the Time Traveller realize that the floor slopes into **darkness**. In the dark corners there is much less dust, which is a sign of the presence of Morlocks. The Time Traveller breaks a lever off of a machine to use as a weapon, and imagines bashing in a Morlock's skull. The impulse disturbs him a little, but he cannot muster any compassion for them.

Upstairs, the Time Traveller finds a gallery of technical chemistry where there is a well-preserved box of matches under glass, as well as a jar of camphor. Finding these **light sources** gives the Time Traveller hope for retrieving his time machine, though he passes the rest of the day without finding any more useful implements.

CHAPTER 9

The Time Traveller and Weena leave the museum just before sunset, and the Time Traveller vows to walk as far as he can through the night and then sleep by the safety of a **fire** so that he can retrieve his time machine in the morning. However, as they reach the thick wood, the Time Traveller feels a sense of doom and exhaustion. Not understanding this to be a warning, he continues on into the **darkness**.

Throughout the walk, the Time Traveller has been gathering sticks as tinder for the **fire** he and Weena will sleep by. As they walk through the woods, though, he feels the Morlocks close by and realizes that he cannot strike a match to keep them at bay without abandoning the wood. He puts down the wood and then decides that, in order to scare the Morlocks, he will light it on fire. The Time Traveller remarks that, at the time, he had no idea how foolish this plan was: they were in a forest that had not for a long time burned all of its natural kindling, so it was ripe for a fire.

A great irony of this section is that the Time Traveller, who once believed he would travel to the future to see the pinnacle of achievement and intelligence, has to resort to raiding a museum for extinct technologies from his own era in order to escape a future he finds disappointing and frightening. This is another moment, too, of Wells putting into perspective the brevity of a lifetime, and even of the human race itself: human technologies are in a natural history museum that itself has been forgotten by history.



The Time Traveller, who prides himself on his intelligence and rationality, finds the impulse towards violence stirred within him by the Morlocks. This sets up, in a way, a parallel between the Time Traveller and the Morlocks—the Morlocks have become cannibals (which disgusts the Time Traveller), but the Time Traveller himself cannot see in the Morlocks enough humanity to disrupt his own violent impulses.



Once again, technologies made simply for illumination are weaponized, and the absurdity of having to retrieve matches from an ancient, airtight museum case shows just how much human development has decayed.



Once again, the Time Traveller does not know when to listen to his fear. When he ignores his fear in controlled circumstances—when he is alert and purposefully taking a risk in order to learn—it tends to pay off, but when he ignores his fear out of stubbornness or stupidity, it leads him astray.



Fire is another example of a “technology” that takes on both positive and negative roles depending on context. Light is the Time Traveller's only weapon against the Morlocks, and light (via fire) brings knowledge through illumination— symbolically as well as literally. However, in this situation the fire turns dangerous. No technology is inherently good or bad—it all depends on how it is used.



For a while, the **fire** lights the Time Traveller's walk and he and Weena have no need for matches. He is dimly aware of the fire spreading, but is not concerned. Finally, they reach an area that is dark enough for the Morlocks to appear, and when he feels them tugging at him he puts Weena down in order to strike a match. He struggles with the Morlocks, but they retreat once the match is lit, and in its light the Time Traveller sees that Weena has fainted. Picking her up, he realizes that he no longer knows which direction he should go.

Throughout this section, many of the reliable delineations between what is good or bad, safe or unsafe, break down. Light and fire now mean both safety and danger, as does the surface of the earth—in the darkness of the woods, the Morlocks are even more at home than the Time Traveller and Weena. When darkness and light are seen as metaphors for the conscious and unconscious mind, this passage comes to resonate with the momentum in the book towards complicating the view of human nature. The Time Traveller must realize that human society cannot evolve to favor only the traits he likes.



The Time Traveller decides to camp where he is for the night, since in the morning **light** he will have a better idea of which way to go. He gathers kindling, realizing just how dry this forest is, and lights a fire while watching the Morlocks' eyes dotting the darkness. He figures he has an hour before he needs to replenish the fire, so he sits down and accidentally falls asleep.

The Time Traveller has made a series of bad decisions that could have been corrected if he had listened to his reasonable fears of the Morlocks and thought more deeply about the dangers of the forest. The Time Traveller, though generally rational and thoughtful, is not immune from folly.



Though it seemed only a moment since he closed his eyes, when the Time Traveller awakens everything is **dark** and the Morlocks are grabbing him. His match box is gone, and he panics, fearing death. Struggling with the Morlocks, he finds the iron bar and begins bashing them, killing the "human rats" and feeling strangely exulted and free.

Throughout the book, the Time Traveller praises the innovation, strength, and intellect that the necessity of coping with danger and fear produces. This passage makes undeniable the flip side of this: fear and danger also produce violence—even a love of violence—and can undermine those very qualities that the Time Traveller values.



The Morlocks retreat from the Time Traveller and are chattering nervously. Suddenly, the Time Traveller becomes aware that the **darkness** is becoming lighter and the Morlocks are fleeing. It is the fire that the Time Traveller started hours before, but it is now raging through the forest. The Time Traveller looks for Weena so he can flee with her, but she is gone, so he flees alone holding his iron bar.

The Time Traveller's mistake in starting the fire has now come back to bite him; while he thought that the fire would be controllable and would lead him to safety, the natural conditions of the forest led to a different outcome. This echoes the ways in which the social conditions of Victorian England led to an outcome (the divergence and decay of the human species) that was different from what the Victorian era desired. It shows that it's very hard to control the future and predict the ways a set of conditions will evolve.



Finally the Time Traveller emerges from the woods, and on the bare hillside he sees Morlocks running around in a blind panic. He strikes several of them before deciding to leave them in their helplessness. He sits on the hillside watching them, hoping he is having a nightmare, until **day** breaks.

As the danger from the Morlocks decreases, the Time Traveller finds himself able to stop being violent towards them. This suggests that the Time Traveller becomes more human in the absence of fear, a direct contradiction of the Time Traveller's own idea that fear is essential to basic human traits. The Time Traveller isn't deluded—it's just that humans are full of contradictions.



The Time Traveller searches for Weena, but he cannot find her. He determines that she has died in the **fire**, and he is heartbroken but also relieved that she died without the Morlocks eating her. Exhausted and overwhelmed, he begins to walk back towards the Sphinx. As he walks, he discovers a few loose matches in his pocket that must have fallen out when the Morlocks took the box.

The fire saves the Time Traveller, but kills Weena—the fire has become emblematic of both progress/safety and danger/destruction, another example of the contradictions of technology. Weena’s death is also an example of the ways in which progress and discovery exact their price. There is always risk inherent to progress.



CHAPTER 10

When the Time Traveller reaches the Sphinx he reflects bitterly on his first innocent notions of this society, thinking now that the Eloi are somewhat like cattle whose needs are all met by farmers but who are then harvested for meat. He continues on, thinking about how human intellect has deteriorated due to lack of struggle. “It’s a law of nature we overlook,” he explains, “that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger, and trouble....Only those animals partake of intelligence that have to meet a huge variety of needs and dangers.” The Morlocks deteriorated because, for many years, all they had to do was operate machines. This allowed them to retain enough intelligence, though, to prey on the Eloi once their food source dried up. The Time Traveller concedes that this explanation could be wrong, but it is the best one he can think of.

Fear and danger have just led the Time Traveller to revel in violently killing Morlocks and to make terrible decisions that risked his life and took Weena’s. It’s indicative of his values that, even so, he still views fear as necessary to humanity. Clearly intelligence is, for him, a more defining human trait than kindness or peace, which makes sense, since his passion is science. The Time Traveller continues to mirror the scientific method in his thought: he has evolved from thinking that the Eloi are a utopian society to thinking of them as livestock. It’s important to note that the Time Traveller always acknowledges that his thinking might be wrong.



The Time Traveller sleeps and wakes up just before sunset. He takes his iron bar and approaches the Sphinx, only to find that the metal panels are already open and the time machine is clearly on display. The Time Traveller casts aside his iron bar and enters the chamber with the time machine.

It seems like a remarkable lapse in judgment that after all his struggles, the Time Traveller believes that the time machine could simply be made available to him in the end, one that shows he’s not as rational as he seems to believe.



As soon as he enters, however, the panels close and the Time Traveller is trapped in the **dark**. The Morlocks begin to approach, and the Time Traveller tries to strike a match so that he can keep them at bay while he fixes the levers on the machine, but he realizes that the matches are the kind that only light on the box. The Time Traveller fights the Morlocks in the darkness while trying to attach the levers and feels that he might lose to them. Nonetheless, he fixes the levers and, just in time, catapults himself away from that moment, leaving the Morlocks behind.

Ultimately, the Time Traveller is alone in the darkness with the Morlocks without any of the technology he brought back from the museum. It is technology that saves him, though—it’s the time machine, the very machine that put him in this danger to begin with. This is a moment of profound contradictions in the role of technology, as it again endangers him and also saves him.



CHAPTER 11

The Time Traveller hurtles through time for a while before he realizes that he is moving forward instead of backwards towards his own era. As he moves, he realizes that the earth's revolutions are slowing, until finally the sun ceases to set and return and the earth is in perpetual **twilight**. The Time Traveller slows the machine until it comes to rest on a desolate beach, where he notices that the sun has become enormous and red and the air is cold and very thin.

The Time Traveller hears a harsh cry and sees a white animal in the sky that looks like a huge butterfly. Then he notices that one of the nearby rocks is moving, and it appears to be a crab as large as a table. The Time Traveller nervously seats himself on the time machine when he feels something brush his face—it's the antennae of another crab. Before it can claw him he pulls the lever further into the future.

Inching into the future, the Time Traveller is “drawn on by the mystery of the earth's fate, watching with a strange fascination the sun grow larger and duller in the westward sky and the life of the old earth ebb away.” The earth gets colder, the sun grows larger, and finally he reaches a point in time where algae on the rocks is the only sign of life. An eclipse of the sun begins, and the Time Traveller remarks on the silence and **darkness** of the world. The Time Traveller begins to feel horror, which is compounded by the sight of a moving tentacled creature. He places himself back in the time machine, pulls the lever, and faints.

CHAPTER 12

The Time Traveller awakens on the time machine, moving backwards towards his own era. Slowly the landscape becomes more recognizable, the laboratory reappears, and the Time Traveller comes to rest back in his home. The Time Traveller wonders for a moment if it had all been a dream, but realizes that the machine has landed several feet away from where it had begun its journey—the distance between where the machine landed in 801,702 to the room inside the Sphinx where the Morlocks brought it.

The passages that describe time travel set up a direct parallel between human history and natural history. The differences between the Time Traveller and the Eloi/Morlocks encourage readers to think about how humans evolve over time, while the passages that describe the changing landscape and the changing sky as seen through time travel show the universe changing in tandem. This shows Wells' conviction that humans have a relatively minor role in natural processes.



The sense of danger and doom grows greater and greater the farther the Time Traveller feels from a human presence. The Eloi were at least close enough to humans to feel sympathy—with the giant crabs, the Time Traveller simply wants to be far away.



Despite his fear of the nonhuman world, the Time Traveller presses on because of his characteristic curiosity about the fate of the world. As he moves farther into the future it becomes irrelevant to look for signs of humanlike creatures, so he searches for signs of any life at all. This emphasizes that humans are, in the end, not dissimilar from algae when viewed in the scheme of the universe.



The Time Traveller, always the skeptic, is even inclined to disbelieve his own experiences. Luckily there is evidence that the time machine has moved. Tying the laboratory to the physical space of the garden and Sphinx statue also emphasizes the tremendous change throughout human history. Permanence is always an illusion.



The Time Traveller then describes realizing the time and date and hearing the voices of his dinner guests—it was then that he came limping into the room, looking disheveled and hurt. He tells his dinner guests that he doesn't expect them to believe him, but, nonetheless, he asks them what they think. The doctor indicates that he doesn't believe the Time Traveller, but when he inspects the **flowers** that Weena had put in the Time Traveller's pocket he notices that they are highly unusual.

Again, the Time Traveller acknowledges that others will be skeptical of his story (just as even he himself was when he landed back in the laboratory). Perhaps the reason that he acknowledges this is that the flowers are the clearest evidence he has of his travels, and they are apparently not enough evidence to prove to the dinner guests that he really traveled in time. Good science requires several corroborating observations or pieces of data, and the Time Traveller has only his dented time machine and Weena's flowers.



The Time Traveller leads his guests into the laboratory to see the time machine, which is dented and covered in grass. On the way out, the guests express disbelief, but the narrator states that he is undecided and he wants to go see the Time Traveller again the next day. When the narrator returns to the Time Traveller's house, the Time Traveller is carrying a backpack and a camera and is about to set off on another voyage. The Time Traveller tells the narrator to wait a half hour for him while the Time Traveller goes forward and back again in time.

This final section is deeply concerned with evidence, and it is notable that the Time Traveller is returning to the future with a camera so that he can corroborate his own observations with physical evidence. The Time Traveller is not simply interested in telling a story—he wants to prove what he saw in order to make people listen to the lessons of the future.



The narrator sits down in another room and the laboratory door closes. Then the narrator hears a noise, a rush of air, and breaking glass—the laboratory, when the narrator goes to inspect, is empty, and a skylight has been blown in. The narrator waited for hours, and he is still waiting—it has been three years, and the Time Traveller hasn't returned.

The Time Traveller went on another voyage in order to advance human knowledge, but this final passage confirms that any quest for knowledge and human improvement must involve risk. This time, it seems that the Time Traveller's risk has not paid off. Furthermore, there is no longer any way of proving or disproving the Time Traveller's tale of the future.



EPILOGUE

The narrator wonders about the Time Traveller's fate, imagining him in a future in which all of mankind's problems are solved. The narrator says he cannot imagine that this (the present) is the pinnacle of human society, despite the Time Traveller's story. Whether or not the Time Traveller is right about the future of man, the narrator reflects, it is important to live as though he isn't. Besides, the narrator has kept the two shriveled **flowers** of Weena's that remind him that "even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man."

Just as it took the Time Traveller many corroborating observations to accept the truth that society had degenerated so thoroughly in the future, the narrator has difficulty accepting this fact based only on the Time Traveller's story. However, even if it is true, the narrator finds solace that humankind didn't lose kindness when it lost everything else. This shows that, for the narrator (unlike, it seems, for the Time Traveller) kindness is a more essential human characteristic than intelligence. And thus Wells ends his rather bleak book on a note of slight optimism.





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