

**PinkMonkey Literature Notes on . . .**

# *The Time Machine*

by

**H. G. Wells**  
**1895**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes.com Staff

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**Note** - H. G. Wells is British and uses two "L's" in the spelling of Traveller. The American spelling is with one "L", but since the traveller is a key part of the novel, we have left that spelling alone and kept it in the original format. While many of the other words have been "Americanized", the spelling of "The Time Traveller and "travelling" with 2 "L's" have been retained in their original British format.

## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

There is but one physical setting for the entire story, but three temporal settings are used over the course of the novel. The book begins in late 19<sup>th</sup> century London, specifically, in the Time Traveller's home in Richmond, a borough on the Thames River, on the outskirts of London. The dining room, smoking room, and laboratory are the only rooms seen and are not fully described, as they are only the setting for the narrative frame which surrounds the real story, told by the Time Traveller himself. The men gather in the smoking room, seating themselves around the Time Traveller, who sits near the fireplace and begins to tell his tale in the dim light of the fire's glow.

The most important setting—the time and place in which most of the story takes place—is still the site of the Time Traveller's house and the area surrounding it, but hundreds of thousands of years into the future. In the year 802701, the buildings that once formed London are completely gone, and all that can be found are the buildings used by the aboveground dwellers, a very large statue of a Sphinx-like creature, the ruins of several other structures and scattered circular wells. Everything else has gone back to nature; trees and flowers fill the Thames Valley.

The third temporal setting is even farther into the distant future, thirty million years hence, and the landscape is even more dramatically different. Now the Thames Valley is a desolate beach, facing an aging ocean with no waves, only an occasional swell. Large white butterflies and huge crablike creatures populate the world, and even further in the future, the crabs are gone and only lichen and an amorphous black creature remain.

## CHARACTER LIST

### Major Characters

**The Time Traveller** - a well-read and intelligent man of science. He is versed in the theories of his day, and very clearly a Darwinist, like Wells himself, and his thoughts echo much of Wells's own theories about the Britain of his time. He is a man of observation, and muses quite a bit about his surroundings, in an attempt to use logical thinking to draw conclusions about the future and its inhabitants. The Time Traveller has a sense of humor about almost everything he encounters, and accepts his friends' skepticism. Witty and somewhat of a joker, this aspect of his personality is part of the reason his friends so quickly dismiss his story and demonstration as a joke.

**The Narrator, Hillyer** - one of the three men present at both dinners. The narrator is the only character who gives any credence to the Time Traveller's claims; he seriously considers the possibility of time travel.

**Eloi** - peaceful but weak and lethargic people who populate the surface of the earth in the year 802701. Small in stature, and delicate featured, the Eloi play all day, feast on fruit in great halls, and sleep in a large communal chambers in order to protect themselves from the dark and the possibility of Morlock attack. Easily tired and childlike, they are not interested in intellectual pursuits, or in the Time Traveller beyond his function as a diversion.

**Morlocks** - aggressive, predatory, ape-like "people" who live beneath the earth's surface in the year 802701. The Morlocks are the descendants of the working class of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continue to labor, maintaining and running huge machines deep in the earth. They have adapted physically to life beneath the

surface, with large, eyes very sensitive to light, and light, unpigmented skin and fur. Carnivores, they feast on the Eloi, who they maintain as a source of meat.

**Weena** - Eloi who the Time Traveller saves from drowning. She becomes a special friend of the Time Traveller, following him around and occasionally serves as a source of information. She eventually is attacked by the Morlocks and dies in the forest fire.

### **Minor Characters**

**The Medical Man** - one of the three men present at both dinners. He considers the Time Traveller's theories and stories, treats the subject seriously at first, but challenges him and remains extremely skeptical. At the demonstration, he maintains that the Time Traveller played a trick on them all.

**The Psychologist** - one of the three men present at both gatherings, who thinks time traveling would be useful, especially for historians, but does not believe in the possibility of it. After the second meeting and hearing the Time Traveller's story, he seems unaffected by it, and does not offer an opinion of it.

**The Editor** - present at the second meeting only. He is the editor of a well-known (but unnamed) daily paper. Outspoken, he remains skeptical of the Time Traveller's story, making jokes about the Time Traveller's appearance at dinner, as well as after he tells his story.

**The Journalist** - present at the second dinner only. He unsuccessfully tries to amuse the dinner party with anecdotes, and after the Time Traveller's story, seems uninterested in whether the story is true or not.

**Provincial Mayor** - present at the first meeting only. He is not very intelligent, nor a man of science.

**Filby** - present at the first meeting only. He is described as "an argumentative person with red hair," and believes Time Traveller's theories go against reason.

**A very young man** - present at the first meeting only. He participates in the discussion about time traveling and the fourth dimension.

**Man with a beard** - present at the second meeting only. He is quiet and shy, and unknown to the narrator.

### **CONFLICT**

**Protagonist** - The Time Traveller is the protagonist of the story, and remains the focal character of the narrative, even when he is not narrating the story himself. His journey into the future and what he finds are the focus of the story. His thoughts dominate the story, and tend to shape the reader's response to the various characters he encounters.

**Antagonist** - On one hand, the main antagonists in the story are the Morlocks. These predatory creatures prey on the helpless Eloi, and on more than one occasion attack the Time Traveller, almost preventing him from returning to his own time. But even more so, the antagonist is the Time Traveller himself, as he attempts to remain a scientific observer, drawing the proper conclusions, discerning the truth of the future, and remaining somewhat distant from the situation, while at the same time wrestling with his fear and apprehension of what humankind has become as well as the possibility of being trapped forever.

**Climax** - The climax in the story comes in the forest, when the Time Traveller builds a fire to provide protection from the Morlocks. This starts the enormous forest fire, during which Weena is lost. His loss of Weena causes him to gain a better understanding of his careless actions throughout his time in the future, and the part he played in Weena's death. From this point, the Time Traveller's resolve to leave the future quickly is

set, and he ceases to consider himself an outside observer. In the forest, the Time Traveller escapes from the Morlocks again, and gains the upper hand.

**Outcome** - The outcome, like many science fiction stories, is that the hero makes a narrow escape, as the Time Traveller leaves the Morlocks and the Eloi behind. He leaves with the knowledge of the repercussions of the policies followed by the Britons in his own time. Like many present day science fiction stories, he is awakened to the result of blind faith in scientific progress, a faith that he had shared. In the very end, the Time Traveller is lost due to his never-ending quest for knowledge.

### **SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)**

The novel begins with the Time Traveller explaining his theories about the fourth dimension to a group of friends and associates gathered at his home for a weekly dinner. Most of the men present follow his explanations, agree in theory to most of his observations, but quickly become skeptical when the Time Traveller moves from speaking of the nature of time to the possibility of moving within it. Their disbelief only increases when the Time Traveller offers to supply evidence to support his theories, bringing a small model into the smoking room. Made of metal, ivory and quartz, the machine, as the Time Traveller explains, is a replica of a full sized machine that he has built in his laboratory, and on which he plans to explore time.

With his guests watching, he demonstrates the use of the machine, pushing a lever, which causes the model to disappear, into the future, the Time Traveller claims. Most of the men are initially disturbed by the presentation, not quite sure what to think, but most come to believe that the Time Traveller has been playing a trick on them, and easily dismiss his assertion that he plans to explore time within the next week.

The following Thursday, another group of men gather at the Time Traveller's house, and find that the host is not at home, but has left a note asking them to start without him. They do so, entertaining themselves with guesses as to why the narrator is not present, when their host enters, disheveled, dirty, and limping.

The Time Traveller returns after washing and changing clothes, to tell the story of his morning, in which he traveled eight days. After dinner, the men gather around him to hear the uninterrupted story. The Time Traveller tells them that that very morning his machine was finally finished, and he soon departed into the future.

He explains that at first he could only pay attention to the sensation of time traveling, which makes him feel queasy. Once he regains his full senses, he begins to be able to observe more fully the speed at which he is traveling, as well as watch the world as time passes. He watches the swiftly changing scenery and then decides to stop to see what the future holds. His stop is sudden, throwing him from the machine into the grass. He finds he is in the same location as his laboratory, but in the year 802701.

He first encounters the Eloi, who approach him soon after his arrival, leading him into a large structure in which they eat and sleep. The Time Traveller partakes of a fruit feast with the Eloi, and explores the area around the structure, observing and making judgments about the nature of the future, which quickly are shown to be incorrect. When he is in the field next, he realizes that his machine has been moved; to where, he cannot figure out. In the next few days, the Time Traveller continues to explore the area, and in the process befriends one particular Eloi named Weena, who he saves from drowning. The Time Traveller, who normally sleeps outside, eventually meets the Morlocks, the other species who inhabit the planet in 802701.

Understanding that it is the Morlocks who moved his machine, most likely into the base of a large stature near to where he first "landed," he decides to descend one of the circular wells that connect the world of the Eloi with that of the Morlocks. He escapes being attacked by the Morlocks, getting to the surface before the Morlocks can get a handle on him. Next, he and Weena explore a great green palace, which turns out to be an

old, deserted museum. There he finds necessary tools--a metal piece that he uses as a mace, a box of matches and a jar of camphor. In the long journey back to the main building where Weena lives, they pass through a dark forest at night. Starting a fire to protect them from the Morlocks, they continue on, but soon the Time Traveller decides to stop and rest, inadvertently falling asleep for much longer than he had wanted. When he wakes up, he is being attacked by the Morlocks, and Weena is missing. Defending himself as best he can, he soon realizes that the entire forest is burning, due to the fire that he previously started. Distraught by the loss of Weena, he manages to escape the raging fire, eventually making it back to the field in which he first arrived in the future.

After resting, he finds that the doors to the base of the statue are open, and he enters, finding his Time Machine inside and intact. Knowing that it is trap, he is unsurprised when the doors suddenly close and Morlocks move in on him, but the escape is not as smooth as he planned. He does get away, meaning to go into the past, but zooming further into the future, because he was unaware of which direction he pulled the lever. Since he is traveling that direction, the Time Traveller decides to see what the earth is like in the year 30 million. He finds the earth and sun dying, and the only life left are crablike creatures and lichen. Disturbed by the haunting imagery and difficulty breathing, he returns to his home to join his guests at dinner.

After finishing his story, he asks for the men's responses. The editor responds first, totally dismissing the story as a fabrication. The lack of faith of the men, and the fantastic nature of his own story makes the Time Traveller question whether or not he really did experience what he told his guests. He leads the men into his laboratory to see if the machine exists. It is exactly where the Time Traveller left it, showing a bit of wear and tear, and the Time Traveller's worries are put to rest, as he becomes confident again in the veracity of his experience. His assuredness only affects the narrator, who gives the Time Traveller the benefit of the doubt, admitting the potential of time travel.

The men depart, but the next day, the narrator returns to the Time Traveller's house, asking him if his story was true. The Time Traveller in return offers further evidence if the narrator is willing to wait half an hour. The narrator agrees; the Time Traveller escapes into his laboratory. The narrator sees a glimpse of a figure, which disappears, and then continues to wait for three years, with no avail. He ends the story with his ponderings as to whether or not the Time Traveller ever will return.

## **THEMES**

### **Major Themes**

The Time Machine has two major themes. The first, that capitalism is dangerous, and harmful to the workers, is evident from the connection, made outright by the Time Traveller, between the Morlocks and late 19<sup>th</sup> century laborers and the Eloi and the London aristocracy. Though the aristocrats may be in control at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as long as their power rests on the mistreatment of other human beings, and on the distancing of the worker from the product of their labor, that power is uncertain. The upset in the established hierarchy did not come not from a revolutionary overthrow, but through gradual changes made over an expanse of time, but the effect is the same, for in the waning days of humanity, there is no seclusion from the predatory nature of the former workers.

This provides the basis for the second, more important theme, which questions the assumption that most people held at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and continue to hold today) that humankind will continue to progress, and that improvements in society and culture are a given thing. Though Wells's story on some levels might be considered optimistic, in his realistic portrayal of what might be possible to do with science, it is extremely pessimistic, offering a warning of the unfettered and unthinking trust in "progress," scientific and otherwise.

## Minor Themes

On a more cheerful note, a minor theme can be found in what Wells seems to be saying about human emotion: one of the only things that will survive throughout time is sympathy and emotion, as seen in the relationship between Weena and The Time Traveller. The Time Traveller becomes attached to Weena because she seems the most human of the Eloi for the reason that she clearly feels affection for the Time Traveller. In this way, she demonstrates a kind of sympathy for him and the position in which he finds himself.

## MOOD

The mood is serious, but not entirely dark or pessimistic, and is often lightened by jokes the Time Traveller makes for his own benefit as well as his listeners'. The story is enhanced with realistic detail, balancing the fantastic content of the story, with the detail of the way it is related.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Much of H. G. Wells's social consciousness most likely resulted from his childhood and early adult life. Born in Bromley, Kent on September 21, 1866, Wells was the son of a shopkeeper and former domestic servant. In 1880, his father's store had financial difficulties, forcing Wells's mother to get a job on a nearby estate, and Wells to become the apprentice to a draper, like his brothers before him. As an avid reader since boyhood—a result of an accident in which he broke his hip—and not keen on the idea of working as a draper for the rest of his life, Wells hated the job, and managed to secure a post for himself as a teacher/pupil at the Midhurst Grammar School in 1883. Soon after, he began attending the Normal School of Science in London.

There he learned biology with T.H. Huxley, perhaps feeding the interest which would manifest itself in his science fiction novels. In 1887, he left the school without a degree, and taught until receiving a B.Sc. in Zoology in 1890. He began his career as a writer in 1893, while working as a teacher in a correspondence college, but his first success was his first novel, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895. He quickly followed with three more of his best-known works: *The Island of Dr. Moreau* in 1896, *The Invisible Man* in 1897 and *The War of the Worlds* in 1898.

Each of the first four novels he wrote deal with fantastic storylines involving scientific processes, or new scientific understanding. It is because of these novels that H.G. Wells is considered one of, if not *the*, father of science fiction. In *The Time Machine*, the protagonist is able to travel hundreds of thousands, and even millions of years into the future. In *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, a scientist transforms animals into humanlike creatures. In *The Invisible Man*, a scientist attempts to gain superhuman powers through his science, and in *The War of the Worlds*, Martians attack the earth. Two lesser known novels, *The First Men on the Moon*, published in 1901, and *The War in the Air*, published in 1908, contribute to Wells's reputation for prophecy, as he imagines space flight and air combat, respectively.

Though Wells might be known best for predicting much of what came to be, as in these cases and the splitting of the atom (*The World Set Free*, 1914), he attempted to not only express the potentials for science, but seriously consider the future mankind, based on the way the present society conducts itself. This is particularly true for *The Time Machine*, in which Wells's origins in a lower class family--which though not laborers, was far from the aristocracy--possibly serve as the starting point for his social critique of the wealthy citizens of London. Wells would remain active in the political scene, running for Parliament (somewhat against his will) twice, and would continue to attack Victorian society, publishing several pamphlets on this subject throughout his life.

H.G. Wells went on to write hundreds of books, short stories and essays, until he died in London on August 18, 1946.

## LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Though most of *The Time Machine* takes place in the future, where the London of Wells's time has been gone for a very long time, Wells's story speaks volumes about the society in which he lived and wrote. The city, in many ways, was at the center of the world, most especially in trade and industrial progress. Both goods produced in the city and those shipped from around the world, especially the colonies, circulated in the city and its harbor and out to all points, creating a great amount of wealth. New transportation allowed the millions of residents to spread further out from the city center, as London expanded its geography as well as its wealth. At the same time, the empirical project was beginning to falter, and more questions were beginning to be asked about the value and morality of maintaining it.

Although wealthy in many ways, Victorian London was not a paradise, most especially for the members of the lowest classes, who labored in terrible conditions. There was social unrest at the beginning of the century, followed by a time of higher wages and more prosperity, but even in these times, many labored on the underground railroad, which was completed in 1865--which the Time Traveller specifically mentions as the beginning of the Morlocks--and after that in similar conditions in factories all around London.

Wells was very interested in the concerns of the lower classes, and the inequality of English society. In 1903, he joined the Fabian Society, a socialist group, which grew out of the Fellowship of New Life, founded in 1883. The group became better known in 1889 when they published *Fabian Essays*. The Fabians held beliefs similar to Marxism in that they recognized the mistreatment of the worker, and the inequalities exacerbated by capitalism, but instead of supporting the theory that revolutionary end must and should be the result of capitalism, they believed that social reforms, and the alteration of present political structures would bring about a gradual amelioration of the social system. These beliefs clearly pervade *The Time Machine*, as the effects of capitalism become expressly clear at a distance of hundreds of thousands of years.

Also at this time, Darwin's theories were becoming accepted as the norm in the scientific community, and Wells's position as a Darwinist can clearly be seen in his application of evolutionary biology to the evolutionary social theory practiced by the Fabians. Thus, just as the social system has gradually changed over the thousands of years, the biology of humans has changed concurrently, in a kind of reciprocal relationship. The Morlocks and Eloi gradually developed their physical characteristics as a result of the gradually changing social system.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

### CHAPTER 1

#### Summary

The Time Traveller, as he is called by the narrator, Hillyer (his name is used very rarely), is speaking to a group of friends and associates gathered in his home for a regular Thursday dinner. The narrator is present (as he usually is, as he is a particular friend of the Time Traveller) along with a group of half a dozen men, mostly referred to by their professions, including the Provincial Mayor, the Medical Man and the Psychologist. At this particular meeting, the Time Traveller is expressing his ideas about the often overlooked fourth dimension—time—and how he believes that man can travel just as easily through it as he does through space. Some of the men tentatively accept his idea of a fourth dimension, and the necessity of a new geometry to account for it, but when he posits his belief that man can travel through time, both backwards and forwards at his own will, the group reject this notion almost entirely.

In response to their skepticism, the Time Traveller brings from his laboratory a model version of a time machine for a demonstration, which provides further proof of his theory. The machine disappears, and the Time Traveller asserts that it remains within the same physical space, but disappeared because it has gone to a different time. The majority of the men are still wary of accepting the conclusion that time travel is possible, believing that the demonstration was just a trick, a slight of hand, and for further proof, the Time Traveller

shows the men the full-scale version of his Time Machine, asserting that with it, he will explore time. The men continue to be incredulous, but the narrator is hesitant to reject the Time Traveller's claims outright.

## Notes

This first chapter introduces the reader to the Time Traveler, as well as his theories. Throughout the chapter, he provides some scientific evidence to back up his claims, based on work being done in Wells's time, a device he will continue to use, as the theories of Darwin and the Fabians are clearly the basis for many of the Time Traveller's own. This provides a measure of reality for a story that would otherwise be a total fantasy, thus challenging a total dismissal of the story that Wells creates as complete fiction, placing the reader somewhat in the position of the narrator and the men at the dinner party. The reader, most likely as skeptical as the men at the party, begins to be led to suspend their disbelief by the narrator's nascent acceptance of the possibility of time travel. This chapter also provides a description of the machine itself, which is made out of nickel, ivory, and quartz, exactly as the model had been, delicately assembled in a "glittering metal framework."

## CHAPTER 2

### Summary

The narrator continues with further description of the Time Traveller, and meditation on the previous night's engagement, explaining that part of the men's skepticism lay in the Time Traveller's reputation for being clever and somewhat tricky. Then, it is Thursday again, and another group of men gather at his house for dinner and discussion. Only three of the men from last Thursday's engagement are present, the narrator, the Doctor and the Psychologist. The men are assembled, but the Time Traveller himself is curiously absent, though apparently had expected that he would be as he left a note for them to start without him if he were not present. The men do so, and as they speculate where he could be, the narrator suggests that he is out time traveling. As the Psychologist explains to the men who had not seen the demonstration the week before, the Time Traveller himself enters, pale, dirty and limping.

After recovering himself with a bit of wine, refusing to answer questions, he leaves to clean up and dress, and promising to tell the story when he returns. When he does return he refuses to tell the story until he has eaten, "starving for a bit of meat," he says, but does confess to time traveling when asked by the narrator. The men sit uncomfortably through the rest of dinner, not knowing what to make of the situation, and then, when finished, the Time Traveller suggests they retire to the smoking-room for the tale. He promises to tell every bit of his seemingly unbelievable tale if the guests promise not to interrupt, to which they unanimously agree. Thus, the Time Traveller begins, claiming that at four o'clock that very day he was in his lab, but since then he had lived eight days.

## Notes

This is the final chapter before the Time Traveller begins to narrate the story, completely taking over the job from the narrator, who will not be heard from again until the very end of the novel. Before the Time Traveller begins, the narrator offers an overall description of the narration, and expresses "the inadequacy of pen and ink...to express [the] quality" of the Time Traveller's tale. The setting for the telling of the story is given, with the men sitting around the Time Traveller in firelight, hanging on to his every word. Again, the men at the party are in a place representative of the reader, as they express their skepticism but are eager to hear what the Time Traveller has to say. The Time Traveller has asked his listeners to suspend their disbelief just as Wells asks his readers to do the same.

## CHAPTER 3

### Summary

The Time Traveller begins his tale, by first explaining how an incorrectly sized element of the machine caused a delay of almost an entire week. He then begins his description of the physical sensation of time traveling—how those sensations are unpleasant, with the feeling as if he were falling, but at the same time in constant motion, slightly swaying. He also describes what he sees while time traveling: flickering views of the world flashing



past, moving faster and faster as he accelerates through time, until he reaches a speed in which he can no longer distinguish movement of anything but the sun, moon and stars. He relates his thought processes during this time as the unpleasant physical sensations become less noticeable in his mental confusion as he attempts to process his journey forward in time. He also explains how he begins to think about what humanity might be like in thousands of years, how he has the opportunity to view it, and that he should consider stopping at some point. The problem is that he might inadvertently stop at a point in which the physical matter of the machine would be unsupportable by the time in which he stopped—for example, that a building might be where his machine attempts to stop—causing a unpredictable reaction as the atoms of the two different physical objects try to occupy the exact same space. He decides to take his chances and just stop, so he pulls the lever quickly, causing his machine to overturn, which in turn causes him to fly from the seat onto the grass.

He finds himself in a garden, in a hailstorm, near a large white statue. The statue is of a sphinx-like creature, and made of marble, with a bronze base. As the storm passes, the unpredictability of his situation dawns on him, and he realizes that he has no idea what kind of creatures inhabit the future world. He begins to prepare his machine for a return home, but regains his courage and decides to press on. He is then approached by a group of humanlike creatures, slim and small and very frail, and the Time Traveller decides to stay in the future.

### **Notes**

In this chapter, the Time Traveller takes over narration of the story, and supplies his description of time traveling. The style in which he does so, with as much preciseness as he can, maintains the story's seeming realism. At the same time, the Time Traveller's musings are given free reign as he considers what the future might hold, much in the same way as the readers, who are waiting, no doubt with expectations of their own, to see what Wells's vision might be.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Summary**

A group of the fragile creatures approach the Time Traveller, and he describes them further. Both sides attempt communication, and the Time Traveller discovers that the small people of the 29<sup>th</sup> century are not as advanced in art and culture and general human knowledge as he had imagined they would be. They are like children, and the Time Traveller experiences extreme disappointment.

The group he encounters leads him to a large building, inside of which is a dining room, where the Time Traveller feasts with the people of the future in their fashion. They eat fruit, and only fruit, though they do have quite a variety of it, with strange ones that the Time Traveller had never seen before. As he is eating, the Time Traveller examines the dining hall, and attempts further conversation with the people around him. After much struggle, the Time Traveller finally discovers the word, "to eat," but in the process, finds out that the people are easily fatigued and quickly grow tired of the extensive endeavors required for him to learn their language or for them to learn his.

After dinner, the Time Traveller explores their communal building, observing their habits and all he could determine about their culture from his limited experience with them. He finds that there were no individual houses, and that all the people lived in the single, large building, the sexes mingling, and everyone living within close contact with each other. He makes the observation that they seemed to be living in relative security, without a necessary care about their well-being or their safety. In his wanderings, he finds a place in which he can view the Thames Valley, and as he does so he muses about his observations, drawing conclusions about what has come to be in the year 802701. He concludes that the age of progress and enlightenment from which he comes is as ultimately successful as it could ever wish to be. In the future, there are no pests such as gnats or weeds, or greater dangers such as disease, or social inequality. As a result, though, was a biological adaptation to the utopian nature of the physical environment. Humankind, because it lacked difficulties and challenges, which favor the strong, grew weak and the race of people, quiet, calm, fragile and peaceful came to rule. There was no need for energy or struggle because there was nothing to overcome, and those qualities that were so

important in the Time Traveller's era, would only be hindrances in the distant future. At that moment, the Time Traveller is pleased with his conclusions, but the chapter ends with his divulging the incorrectness of his theories.

## Notes

This chapter gives further description of the Eloi, as the Time Traveller will later call them, one of the two races he meets on his trip to the future. They are peaceful, weak, and indolent, and their nature goes against much of what the Time Traveller values in a people. He frequently refers to them as children or childish, and his feeling of intellectual superiority is clear. His theories about how humankind ended up as the Eloi give a glimpse of the process of drawing conclusions that a man of science in Wells's time might be familiar with. The Time Traveller is clearly well read in Darwin's theories of natural selection, and his quick assumption that the Eloi practice communism, demonstrates his comfort with Marx's writings as well. This chapter also gives further description of the way the landscape has changed; fields of trees and flowers have replaced London's congestion. The reader is left with an unexpected picture of where England's great society is headed, and the Time Traveller's references to his own errors about the nature of the future world, add a feeling of uncertainty to the direction of the narrative.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary

Night fell while the Time Traveller was musing and so he heads back toward the building in which the feast had been served. In doing so, he discovers that the time machine is not where he left it, and suddenly he is faced with the idea that he could be trapped in the future world. He runs to the lawn with the sphinx and finds that the time machine had in fact been taken away. Overtaken by fear and anger, the Time Traveller runs to the building and into the sleeping chamber, accosting the people asleep there. Unable to communicate his distress and realizing his attempt to do so in his present emotional state, the Time Traveller leaves the building, wild and bewildered, wanders about outside and then falls asleep in the grass.

In the morning, refreshed and better composed, the Time Traveller returns to the lawn where he had arrived to investigate his disappearance. He discovers that the bronze base of the large sphinx statue is hollow, and that the machine seems to have been dragged in there. He attempts to open the base, and tries to enlist the help of various people passing by, but his suggestion elicits disgust and horror, so he quickly gives up trying. The Time Traveller decides to be patient and not disturb his hosts, and instead begins to focus on learning the language more fully.

He continues his investigation of the changes to the landscape, and the culture of the Eloi. He discovers numerous circular wells, reaching deep into the ground, which have been made for some purpose other than gathering water, and he notes, as well, the lack of cemeteries or any other type of housing for the dead. With his new observations, he begins to believe that his initial conclusions were far from the truth, yet he cannot fathom what the truth might be. He does not understand how the world maintains itself, when he could not see any type of labor being performed, and there were mysteries, such as who took his time machine and why, yet to be solved.

The same day of these explorations, the Time Traveller rescues one of the Eloi from drowning in a river. The girl he saves, Weena, becomes a great friend, accompanying him wherever he goes, and through her he is able to learn more about the Eloi, and the world they live in. He quickly learns is that they fear the night and dark places, and consequently gather together in the large house to sleep each night.

The Time Traveller soon has his first true glimpse of the other race that inhabits the future. Seeking shelter from a hot day in a ruin, he comes across two white, ape-like creatures hiding in the darkness. He follows it for a closer look, and then discovers that it has retreated down one of the circular wells that he had noticed before. He then realizes that humankind has split into two different species, the fragile creatures of the Upper World,

and the apelike creatures of the lower. After failing to elicit more information from two Upper World creatures, which remain alarmed that he is near one of the wells, he muses some more about how humans have gotten themselves to that point in the future.

The Time Traveller draws a number of conclusions about the Morlocks, satisfying himself first with the obvious ones: that the creatures are subterranean—based on their unpigmented fur, their enlarged eyes, and their clumsiness when running through daylight; that the ground below must be extensively tunneled, with ventilation shafts for air and wells as means of transport to the surface. He then meditates on how the split occurred, and realizes that it was a simple outcome of the difference between classes in his own time. In London the workers were being forced increasingly underground, so it was a natural conclusion that they had stayed down there, continuing to labor, deeper and deeper under the surface, coming to the surface less and less, while the rich remained on the surface, receiving the spoils of the laborers' work. The Time Traveller feels satisfied with his conclusion, but remains confused as to why the Undergrounders wanted his time machine. He asks Weena, who refuses to answer his questions.

### **Notes**

In this chapter, much is learned about both the Eloi and the Morlocks, and this is the first chapter in which both names are discovered by the Time Traveller. The Time Traveller has his first encounter with the Morlocks, and he realizes the extent of the error of his previous theories. Wells's theories of the evils of capitalism are not very veiled, as the Time Traveller discusses the inevitable conclusion of the gulf between the Capitalists and the Laborers. The rich continue to seclude themselves more and more in the most beautiful parts of the country, while the lower classes slave away under the surface in the subways and underground workrooms, so that the upper classes may continue to enjoy their seclusion. The result is a barbarian class that the weak, ineffective upper class is totally dependent upon. The Time Traveller thus combines the theories of Marx and Darwin, demonstrating the way that the steady mistreatment of workers and their separation from the fruits of their labor would result, over a large period of time, in altering not only the culture and society, but also the very essence of humanity.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Summary**

The Time Traveller becomes more apprehensive and begins sleeping in the great hall with the Eloi. He continues his explorations of the area, going further out than he had before, finding a large building made of a kind of green porcelain, but he quickly realizes that his interest in such things is mostly a way of avoiding the necessary descent into the regions below the surface. Much to Weena's dismay, he tackles his fear, and begins to descend one of the wells. He discovers that the metal bars made for the purpose are not suited to a being his size, nor his weight, as he grows fatigued from being cramped, and one of the bars bends while he was stopped to rest.

He finds a place in the wall where he can rest more safely, and lays there until three of the Morlocks approach him. He inadvertently frightens them away when he lights a match, and then he follows their path further down the tunnel in which he had paused for rest. He comes upon a great open space with machinery and a carnivorous feast laid. He examines the room as best he can with the light of a match, and then a group of the Morlocks begins to examine him, picking at his clothing and touching his face. He attempts to flee, is followed by the Morlocks, who try to pull him back, but manages to escape to the surface to the awaiting Weena.

### **Notes**

The Time Traveller discusses his fear, and his new understanding of the habits of the Eloi. He also realizes his unpreparedness for the journey, as a result of his assumptions that future humankind would be much more advanced than his present society. When he encounters the Morlocks, he discovers more about them, most notably to him that they eat meat. His disgust of the Morlocks is enhanced, and his fear for his own life is also increased by his very narrow escape.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Summary**

The time of the Dark Nights, or of the new moon, is approaching, and the Eloi, as well as the Time Traveller, experience an increased amount of fear. The Time Traveller discovers that his theory of the Eloi continued power was incorrect, and that the time of their superiority had long passed, that now, they possessed the surface because the Morlocks did not want it any more, and that the Morlocks continued to supply their basic needs out of habit. The Time Traveller decides that he needs a weapon of some sort, as well as a safe place to sleep, one protected from the Morlocks. He sets off for the green porcelain building, in hopes of fulfilling both needs. Weena accompanies him, placing things in his pockets as they travel the long distance. At this point in the story, the Time Traveller pauses, places a withered flower on the table for his listeners to see, and then continues telling them about his journey to the green palace. Night falls, they are still some distance from their destination, and a foreboding wood interrupts their progress. They stop, and the Time Traveller decides to sleep in their present location, rather than pressing on. During the night, the Time Traveller examines the stars and the way they had changed, as well as muses about his own insignificance in relation to the long existence of the stars and the earth.

The morning comes with no incident, and they continue on their way, meeting other Eloi as they go. The Time Traveller becomes convinced that the meat he saw at the Morlocks' feast was indeed the flesh of an Eloi, and the Time Traveller becomes even more disgusted at the ways of the Morlocks. He begins to believe that the Morlocks sustain the Eloi only to have them as a source of meat. The Time Traveller tries to view the matter scientifically, but his connection to the Eloi causes him to remain sympathetic to their plight and their fear. The Time Traveller develops his plan of action; he must first find a safe place to hide, and then make a weapon, and possibly a torch to defend himself against the Morlocks. He would next try to open the doors of the Sphinx to get at his machine, and escape back to his own time.

### **Notes**

The Time Traveller refines his theories about the relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks, coming to understand the horrible, unexpected nature of it. This is the only point in which the Time Traveller interrupts his narrative, and he does so to offer "proof" to his listeners.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Summary**

The Time Traveller and Weena reach the palace, which they discover is actually an old museum falling into ruins. They explore the building, finding most of its contents turned to dust, or shattered. After reaching a dark part of the building, the Time Traveller remembers his quest, and finds his necessities—he breaks of a lever of an old machine to use as a weapon, finds a perfectly preserved box of matches, as well as a bottle of camphor. He finds other weapons—guns, hatchets, swords—which he must leave behind, as well as a wealth of other decaying museum pieces. They leave the museum, and the Time Traveller decides that sleeping next to a fire is their best hope for protection.

### **Notes**

In this chapter, the Time Traveller's (and thus Wells's) sense of humor is displayed. The Time Traveller muses at the futility of writing and publishing books that will just disintegrate in an old museum, which makes him think of the books he has written himself. He plays among the dusty antiques, writing his name on an old idol, and amusing himself with thoughts about what he could do to rescue his machine, and himself. The Time Traveller's dislike of the Morlocks continues to increase, especially once he has a weapon with which he might fight back, and his fear of them begins to wane somewhat. He speaks of murdering them, and only refraining because of Weena. He leaves the museum with new confidence that he will be able to rescue himself soon.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Summary**

The Time Traveller and Weena start back to the large house and the sphinx, pressing on into the woods, even though it is night, in order to try to get to the other side before they slept. After seeing three Morlocks near their location, the Time Traveller decides to light a small fire in an attempt to keep the Morlocks from following them through the forest. As they continue into the forest, more Morlocks can be heard around them, growing closer and more daring. The Time Traveller lights a cube of camphor and tosses it back to distract and disturb the Morlocks. He picks up Weena, who has fainted, and continues on, but quickly discovers that he is not sure of his present location, or the proper direction to travel. As a result, they camp in their spot for the night, and the Time Traveller builds a large fire to protect them. He lies down, and falls asleep and wakes up to find that his fire had gone out, the Morlocks had taken his matches and Weena. He finds his iron mace, and fights off the Morlocks currently attacking him, and then finds that the forest is burning. He makes it to the summit of a hill and watches the Morlocks' total confusion as a result of the fire. He then decides that Weena is lost forever, and so he continues on to the Sphinx.

### **Notes**

The Time Traveller foreshadows the fire by sharing his thoughts about how nature must react to fire after a long absence from it. The Time Traveller reaches a new emotional low after losing Weena, and the error of his choices are again painfully clear to him by the end of the night. The value of his relationship with Weena also becomes more evident after she is gone. The Time Traveller mentions his loneliness and thoughts of the present company (who are listening to his story) and his longing to see them. The Time Traveller makes clear that although in most ways Weena is far from similar to humans from his day, her feelings for him were very human, in the most important similarity there could be.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Summary**

The Time Traveller reaches the lawn with the sphinx, the very first place he step foot into the future. He thinks about his first, false impressions of the world, and the actual world that he encountered. He muses on the terrible outcome of man's progress. Tired from recent events, he takes a nap. Waking up, he approaches the sphinx and finds that the doors are opened. He enters, and approaches his time machine, which is inside. The doors shut, and the Morlocks approach him. He tries to light a match, which fails, and instead, fighting off the Morlocks, attaches the levers he had been carrying with him, and disappears into the past.

### **Notes**

The Time Traveller supplies his last musings about the nature of the future, and his final conclusions. The last fight, he claims is more of a close call than his fight in the forest, and his flight from the fire, but he manages to fight them off and get away.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Summary**

The Time Traveller reminds his listeners of the sickness he feels while time traveling, and explains that it was exacerbated by his improper seating due to his quick getaway. He finds that he is actually traveling further into the future, having pulled the levers the wrong way in the confusion of his getaway. He describes the changing heavens, as the sun ceases to set and begins to grow red. He slowly stops the time machine, on a deserted beach, surrounded by reddish rocks. No waves disturb the sea, and the Time Traveller discovers that the air is much thinner in the future. After seeing a huge white butterfly and hearing its scream, the Time Traveller realizes that the reddish rocks are actually huge crab-like creatures. When the crabs begin to approach and one starts to attack him, the Time Traveller moves further into the future. He finds that bleakness pervades the landscape, which only increases in the future. He continues into the future, a thousand years more, curious as to the earth's fate, where he observes the growing darkness of an eclipse beginning, and that there seems to be no

life stirring except the most basic plant life. The air grows increasingly cold, and the Time Traveller becomes sick, barely making it onto the machine to leave the future.

## Notes

The Time Traveller's experiences demonstrate pessimism about the ultimate fate of the earth and sun, as the Time Traveller watches them both begin to die, but the end fits the evolutionary theory of the establishment of life and development of the earth.

## CHAPTER 12

### Summary

The Time Traveller returns to his own time, ending up in his laboratory hours after he first left it. He gets off the machine, very shaken, trying to decide if what he experienced was actually a dream, but realizes that his machine has moved from one end of his laboratory to another, the distance from his machine's original location on the lawn, to the pedestal of the sphinx. He finishes his story, bringing them all to the time in which he entered the dining room. He ends his tale with an acknowledgement of the fantastic nature of it, and asks their opinions of the story. The Editor is the first to respond, claiming that the Time Traveller would be a good writer. The Time Traveller accepts this, but still maintains the possibility of its truth, based on scars on his hand and the flowers on the table. The Medical Man examines the flowers, requesting permission to take them with him, but the Time Traveller refuses. He then grows distracted and bewildered, unsure of his own experiences. He goes to the lab to see if his machine is still there, and the men follow. The machine is in the lab, and the men examine it, finding it dented and bent, with bits of grass sticking to it, and the Time Traveller is convinced that he did not dream his experiences. The men remain skeptical, all except the original narrator of the story, who believes it to be possible.

The next day, the narrator visits the Time Traveller, who assures him that he really did travel through time. The Time Traveller tells the narrator that if given a half an hour, he could prove it, by bringing back things from the future. The narrator agrees to wait and soon hears an exclamation and a thud. Going to investigate, he sees an indistinct figure, which then disappears. He goes out to wait, and ends his story with the disclosure that he has been waiting for three years, and never expects to see the Time Traveller again.

## Notes

The Time Traveller completes his story and the narrator relates the men's reactions to the Time Traveller. They all remain skeptical, especially fitting for their roles as men of science, like the Psychologist and the Medical man, and men of factual stories, like the Editor and the Journalist. The narrator maintains his faith in the Time Traveller, trusting that such things are in fact possible.

## EPILOGUE

### Summary

The narrator considers what might have happened to the Time Traveller and if there is a chance of ever seeing him again. He suggests that perhaps he went into the nearer future, into a time in which man's problems are solved, but humankind is not on the wane, as it was in the 29<sup>th</sup> century. The narrator ends on a hopeful note, noting, that even if in the future, civilization collapses upon itself, human kindness, as evidenced by Weena's flowers, still remains.

## Notes

The narrator offers his final words about humankind's unknown future, suggesting that we should not live with a pessimistic view of our future and the future of all our descendants, but instead, live our lives as best that we can, hoping for a bright future, rather than the bleak one the Time Traveller experienced. This ending ties together the pessimism of the Time Traveller's experiences, with an optimism in the potentials for science and humanity, if humans were to more fully consider the consequences of their actions.

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**The Time Traveller** - The Time Traveller is a man of wit and intelligence, and thus a perfect candidate for interpreting the future for the readers. He is well versed in all the major theories of his day, from math and science to philosophy and economics. He is a member of the upper-class, as he has the money to fund his scientific pursuits, and host the weekly dinners that the narrator attends. Although he must be somewhat wealthy, he is socially conscious, as he dislikes an ostentatious show of wealth, evidenced by the fact that he does not have his servants wait on his guests at dinner. Likewise, he is cognizant of the mistreatment of workers within the city of London, and the dangers of working in squalid conditions. It is through his eyes that we see the future world, and his interpretations guide ours. As he makes his observations, he automatically draws conclusions based on his evidence, but he remains open to altering his hypotheses as he gains more information, as a good scientist should. He also is quick to admit to being incorrect and drawing the wrong conclusion about the world of the future. This shows him to be a much more sympathetic character, and makes his final conclusions more solid, as he has considered all of his experiences carefully.

As an educated man, it is all the more significant that his notion of the future of humankind be upset, as his thoughts about the future are based on the best known, and most respected theories of his time. His realization disturbs him completely, as he is faced with a society far from what he expected. Likewise, it becomes clear, that even intelligent scientists do not handle situations in the best way possible, when making decisions in moment. His stereotypes are upset as he befriends Weena, for as his affection for her grows, his initial, strong revulsion for the species is lessened.

In the end, the Time Traveller returns from his journey with far more knowledge about himself and his society, and new ideas about the path his country is following. Though his friends do not believe his story, his telling it allows him to share his resultant observations of the London of his time. His story may answer the question of what will happen to England in thousands of years, but his final disappearance reinstates the mystery of the future, as the reader remains unclear as to where the Time Traveller went for his next trip, and why he never returned.

**The Narrator, Hillyer** - The narrator's character serves mostly to support the Time Traveller's claims. Not much is seen of the narrator, but his faith in the Time Traveller's theories and story, demonstrate his open-mindedness, as well as his faith in the miracles of science. Since he is the means for the reader to hear the Time Traveller's tale, it is easy to sympathize and agree with his position. As a result, his epilogue is almost a direct address of the reader, as he speaks directly to how he might use in his daily life the information he gains from the Time Traveller's story. The narrator is of a new generation of young minds, deciding what they believe, and what they want to do with those beliefs. As the character who receives the final word, his words gain an emphasis. Since he ends on a fairly upbeat note, the reader is left with an overall optimism of life's possibilities, tempered by a warning to live in consideration of the potential future.

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

*The Time Machine* follows the pattern of many of Wells's novels, with a narrator beginning the story, creating a frame, for the other, more important story. In *The Time Machine*, the narrator is at the Time Traveller's house, and the scientific ground is being laid for the rest of the story. The narrator, Hillyer, is named, but this is not used much as it is unimportant who the narrator is. His most important function is to suspend his disbelief of such a fantastic concept as time travel, and provide a measure of realism to balance the unreal nature of the rest of the story.

On the night of the second dinner, the novel shifts into the Time Traveller's point of view, as he begins the story of his eight-day journey. This continues uninterrupted until the seventh chapter, in which the Time Traveller offers further evidence for his tale, in a handful of flowers that had been placed into his pocket by Weena. This

break allows for a pause in the rising action, building suspense somewhat, but more importantly, reminds the readers that the story they are reading is being told “in person” by the person who experienced it, looking back on his adventures, rather than being constructed by an author spinning a tale just for the enjoyment of his readers.

After the Time Traveller ends his story, the narrator resumes his role as interpreter for the reader. As the narrator sympathizes with the Time Traveller, and believes that it might be possible, in light of the evidence—the flowers, the wear and tear of the machine—the Time Traveller’s observations are given a weight that might not have occurred otherwise. The readers of the novel, whether in Wells’s time or ours, most likely will not take his novel for fact, or for possibility even, but the structure of the novel adds to the realistic portrayal of the information, which gives validity not to the actuality of time travel, but the potentiality of class differences increasing. Time travel may not be possible, but understanding the nature of one’s society and the ills of a strict class hierarchy, are possible, and a focus of the novel, in its content as well as its structure. Reading the first hand account of the future society allows for a greater sympathy with Weena and the other Eloi as well as a greater understanding of the horrors of the future, which, for Wells, are directly related to the evils of the present. The Time Traveller, when he is the narrator, is given free reign for his musings, and then, in the Epilogue, the narrator is given the same, allowing for a bit of hope, and a warning, for the readers as they complete the novel.

## **THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS**

The themes found in *The Time Machine* reflect Wells’s continued displeasure with the policies created by the British government of his time. His later novels would engage with the problems of his society more fully, but his consciousness of the ill effects of capitalism and the blind trust placed in unchecked industrialization clearly shape the themes of this, his very first novel. Even though the novel emphasizes the wonderful things possible through the advances of science and the popularity of the book was most likely the result of Wells’s imagination rather than his interpretation of London society, the novel still focuses on themes warning the reader of trusting the status quo of the present social hierarchy without thinking of the consequences of continuing with the same social irresponsibility. Wells’s first novels are considered to be overwhelmingly optimistic in the possibilities of science, but there is a note of pessimism to how he imagines the future might be.

But, the pessimism is restricted to the effects of society, not science itself, which is pure, and separate from the Time Traveller’s experience in the future. Science is the means for him getting there, but not the cause of the future society, aside from its contribution to England’s increased industrialization. There is optimism in his view of science and how technology might be used and developed.

Likewise, Wells’s views of the constancy of human feeling offer a positive view of the future. Weena’s unrestricted affection for the Time Traveller, across a language barrier and without any shared history, demonstrates the way in which human emotion might continue even when all other similarities to life as we know it have been gone for centuries.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS**

1. *The Time Machine* has a particular narrative structure, in which a narrator creates a frame for the Time Traveller’s story. What effect does this structure have on the content of the story? Does it affect the way the readers consider the themes of the novel?
2. Describe the Time Traveller’s role as a scientist exploring the future. Does he have any obligations or codes of conduct he should follow? Do you think he handles his situation well?
3. How would you describe the narrator’s relationship to the Time Traveller? Does this affect the way you interpret the story, or the novel’s themes?
4. Describe what the Time Traveller finds in the year 30,000,000. Does this fit with Wells’s beliefs as a Darwinist?



5. Explain the relationship between the Eloi and the Morlocks, and the main characteristics of each. What did you think of each species? Did you sympathize with either?
6. The Eloi are the descendents of the wealthy, upper-classes in Wells's time, and thus, in many ways, the cause of the mistreatment of the laborers. Yet, in the future, the Time Traveller feels the most connection to Weena and the other Eloi. Does this affect the way you interpret Wells's critique of British class structure? Why or why not?
7. Wells's novels, including *The Time Machine*, are considered to be among the very first examples of science fiction writing. How does this novel compare with science fiction novels of today? What can you find that is directly a result of Wells's writing? What is different?
8. Wells's description of the time machine, time traveling, and the future are all very vivid, and somewhat cinematic. How does this novel compare to science fiction films that you have seen? Does the medium affect the way you think about the message underneath?
9. In the epilogue, the narrator offers his interpretation of the Time Traveller's journey, sharing his philosophy of how to live life. What are his suggestions and thoughts? Do you agree with him?
10. Do you see any themes similar to other works by Wells? What about to his later novels? How does Wells change as a writer?
11. Where do you think the Time Traveller fits in the social hierarchy? Do you think this affects his observations of the future?

## COMMENT ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of literature is not like the study of math or science, or even history. While those disciplines are based largely upon fact, the study of literature is based upon interpretation and analysis. There are no clear-cut answers in literature, outside of the factual information about an author's life and the basic information about setting and characterization in a piece of literature. The rest is a highly subjective reading of what an author has written; each person brings a different set of values and a different background to the reading. As a result, no two people see the piece of literature in exactly the same light, and few critics agree on everything about a book or an author.

In this study guide for a well-known piece of literature, we have tried to give an objective literary analysis based upon the information actually found in the novel, book, or play. In the end, however, it is an individual interpretation, but one that we feel can be readily supported by the information that is presented in the guide. In your course of literature study, you or your professor/teacher may come up with a different interpretation of the mood or the theme or the conflict. Your interpretation, if it can be logically supported with information contained within the piece of literature, is just as correct as ours. So is the interpretation of your teacher or professor.

Literature is simply not a black or white situation; instead, there are many gray areas that are open to varying analyses. Your task is to come up with your own analysis that you can logically defend. Hopefully, these booknotes will help you to accomplish that goal.

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