

# The Final Men

by H.G. Wells

*The first complete, published version of The Time Machine appeared as a five-part serial in the January through May 1895 issues of New Review, edited by William Ernest Henley. In the introduction to the 1924 edition, Wells wrote about the back-and-forth between himself and Henley, saying that “There was a slight struggle between the writer and W.E. Henley who wanted, he said, to put a little ‘writing’ into the tale.”*

*One piece of that writing was a short episode after the traveller leaves the Eloi and the Morlocks, just before visiting the red sun and the end of the world. This episode was deleted from both the American (Holt text) and the British (Heinemann text) published book editions of the novel, but it did appear as a 7-page mimeographed and stapled publication from American fan Robert W. Lowndes in 1940, and it appeared in a number of other places, sometimes called “The Grey Man” and once called “The Missing Pages.” Those other appearances are documented at the end of this pdf.*

*This particular transcription comes from [Wikisource](#).*

—Michael Main, storypilot.com

“I have already told you of the sickness and confusion that comes with time travelling. And this time I was not seated properly in the saddle, but sideways and in an unstable fashion. For an indefinite time I clung to the machine as it swayed and vibrated, quite unheeding how I went, and when I brought myself to look at the dials again I was amazed to find where I had arrived. One dial records days, another thousands of days, another millions of days, and another thousands of millions. Now, instead of reversing the levers I had pulled them over so as to go forward with them, and when I came to look at these indicators I found that the thousands hand was sweeping round as fast as the seconds hand of a watch—into futurity. Very cautiously, for I remembered my former headlong fall, I began to reverse my motion. Slower and slower went the circling hands until the thousands one seemed motionless and the daily one was no longer a mere mist upon its scale. Still slower, until the grey haze around me became distincter and dim outlines of an undulating waste grew visible.

“I stopped. I was on a bleak moorland, covered with a sparse vegetation, and grey with a thin hoarfrost. The time was midday, the orange sun, shorn of its effulgence, brooding near the meridian in a sky of drabby grey. Only a few

black bushes broke the monotony of the scene. The great buildings of the decadent men among whom, it seemed to me, I had been so recently, had vanished and left no trace, not a mound even marked their position. Hill and valley, sea and river—all, under the wear and work of the rain and frost, had melted into new forms. No doubt, too, the rain and snow had long since washed out the Morlock tunnels. A nipping breeze stung my hands and face. So far as I could see there were neither hills, nor trees, nor rivers: only an uneven stretch of cheerless plateau.

“Then suddenly a dark bulk rose out of the moor, something that gleamed like a serrated row of iron plates, and vanished almost immediately in a depression. And then I became aware of a number of faint-grey things, coloured to almost the exact tint of the frost-bitten soil, which were browsing here and there upon its scanty grass, and running to and fro. I saw one jump with a sudden start, and then my eye detected perhaps a score of them. At first I thought they were rabbits, or some small breed of kangaroo. Then, as one came hopping near me, I perceived that it belonged to neither of these groups. It was plantigrade, its hind legs rather the longer; it was tailless, and covered with a straight greyish hair that thickened about the head into a Skye terrier’s mane. As I had understood that in the Golden Age man had killed out almost all the other animals, sparing only a few of the more ornamental, I was naturally curious about the creatures. They did not seem afraid of me, but browsed on, much as rabbits would do in a place unfrequented by men; and it occurred to me that I might perhaps secure a specimen.

“I got off the machine, and picked up a big stone. I had scarcely done so when one of the little creatures came within easy range. I was so lucky as to hit it on the head, and it rolled over at once and lay motionless. I ran to it at once. It remained still, almost as if it were killed. I was surprised to see that the things had five feeble digits to both its fore and hind feet—the fore feet, indeed, were almost as human as the fore feet of a frog. It had, moreover, a roundish head, with a projecting forehead and forward-looking eyes, obscured by its lank hair. A disagreeable apprehension flashed across my mind. As I knelt down and seized my capture, intending to examine its teeth and other anatomical points which might show human characteristics, the metallic-looking object, to which I have already alluded, reappeared above a ridge in the moor, coming towards me and making a strange clattering sound as it came. Forthwith the grey animals about me began to answer with a short, weak yelping—as if of terror—and bolted off in a direction opposite to that from which this new creature approached. They must have hidden in burrows or behind bushes and tussocks, for in a moment not one of them was visible.

“I rose to my feet, and stared at this grotesque monster. I can only describe it by comparing it to a centipede. It stood about three feet high, and had a long segmented body, perhaps thirty feet long, with curiously overlapping greenish-black plates. It seemed to crawl upon a multitude of feet, looping its body as it advanced. Its blunt round head with a polygonal arrangement of black eye spots, carried two flexible, writhing, horn-like antennae. It was coming along, I should judge, at a pace of about eight or ten miles an hour, and it left me little time for thinking. Leaving my grey animal, or grey man, whichever it

was, on the ground, I set off for the machine. Halfway I paused, regretting that abandonment, but a glance over my shoulder destroyed any such regret. When I gained the machine the monster was scarce fifty yards away. It was certainly not a vertebrated animal. It had no snout, and its mouth was fringed with jointed dark-coloured plates. But I did not care for a nearer view.

“I traversed one day and stopped again, hoping to find colossus gone and some vestige of my victim; but, I should judge, the giant centipede did not trouble itself about bones. At any rate both had vanished. The faintly human touch of these little creatures perplexed me greatly. If you come to think, there is no reason why a degenerate humanity should not come at last to differentiate into as many species as the descendants of the mud fish who fathered all the land vertebrates. I saw no more of any insect colossus, as to my thinking the segmented creature must have been. Evidently the physiological difficulty that at present keeps all the insects small had been surmounted at last, and this division of the animal kingdom had arrived at the long awaited supremacy which its enormous energy and vitality deserve. I made several attempts to kill or capture another of the greyish vermin, but none of my missiles were so successful as my first; and, after perhaps a dozen disappointing throws, that left my arm aching, I felt a gust of irritation at my folly in coming so far into futurity without weapons or equipment. I resolved to run on for one glimpse of the still remoter future—one peep into the deeper abyss of time—and then to return to you and my own epoch. Once more I remounted the machine, and once more the world grew hazy and grey.

“As I drove on, a peculiar change crept over the appearance of things. The unwonted greyness grew lighter; then—though I was travelling with prodigious velocity—the blinking succession of day and night, which was usually indicative of a slower pace, returned, and grew more and more marked. This puzzled me very much at first. The alternations of night and day grew slower and slower, and so did the passage of the sun across the sky, until they seemed to stretch through centuries. At last a steady twilight brooded over the earth, a twilight only broken now and then when a comet glared across the darkling sky. The band of light that had indicated the sun had long since disappeared; for the sun had ceased to set—it simply rose and fell in the west, and grew ever broader and more red. All trace of the moon had vanished. The circling of the stars, growing slower and slower, had given place to creeping points of light. At last, some time before I stopped, the sun, red and very large, halted motionless upon the horizon, a vast dome glowing with a dull heat, and now and then suffering a momentary extinction. At one time it had for a little while glowed more brilliantly again, but it speedily reverted to its sullen red-heat. I perceived by this slowing down of its rising and setting that the work of the tidal drag was done. The earth had come to rest with one face to the sun, even as in our own time the moon faces the earth.

“I stopped very gently and sat upon the Time Machine, looking round.”

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## Publications of this Episode

1. Appears within *The Time Machine* (Part 5), *New Review*, May 1895.
2. “The Final Men,” 7-page mimeographed (or possibly hectographed) and stapled publication by the American fan Robert W. Lowndes, March 1940.
3. “The Missing Pages (from the Time Machine)”, *Satellite Science Fiction*, August 1958.
4. Appears within the version of *The Time Machine* that was part of *Three Prophetic Novels of H.G. Wells*, Dover Publications, June 1, 1960.
5. “The Final Men” (listed as “The Last Men” on the cover), in *Perry Rhodan #101, Blockade: Lepso*, Ace Books, August 1976.
6. “The Final Men,” in *Ackermanthology: 65 Astonishing, Rediscovered Sci-Fi Shorts* (Forrest J. Ackerman, editor), General Publishing Group, April 1997.
7. “The Grey Man,” in *Timescapes: Stories of Time Travel* (Peter Haining, editor), Souvenir Press, August 1997.
8. “The Grey Man,” in *Time Travelers: Fiction in the Fourth Dimension* (Peter Haining, editor), Barnes & Noble Books, 1998.
9. Appears within a restored version of *The Time Machine*, Easton Press, 1998.
10. “The Final Men,” in *Ackermanthology: 65 Astonishing, Rediscovered Sci-Fi Shorts, Millennium Edition* (Forrest J. Ackerman, editor), Sense of Wonder Press, September 2000.
11. “The Grey Man,” in *The Book of Time* (introduced by Fender Tucker), Surinam Turtle Press, February 2011.
12. “The Grey Man,” at [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Grey\\_Man](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Grey_Man), April 14, 2012.