

Into the Future

Adapted from *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells

In this extract, based on *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, a character called the Time Traveller tells the story of his voyage into the future, in a time machine he has built himself.

It was at ten o'clock today that the first of all Time Machines began its career. I gave it a last tap, tried all the screws again, put one more drop of oil on the quartz rod, and sat myself in the saddle. I drew a breath, set my teeth, gripped the starting lever with both hands, and went off with a thud.

Soon, the laboratory got hazy and went dark. I pressed the lever over to its extreme position. The night came like the turning out of a lamp, and in another moment came tomorrow. I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling. They are excessively unpleasant. There is a feeling exactly like one has upon a switchback – of a helpless headlong motion! I felt the same horrible anticipation, too, of an imminent smash.

As I put on pace, night followed day like the flapping of a black wing. The slowest snail that ever crawled dashed by too fast for me. As I went on, still gaining velocity, the palpitation of night and day merged into one continuous greyness; the sky took on a wonderful deepness of blue; the jerking sun became a streak of fire, a brilliant arch, in space.

The landscape was misty and vague. I saw trees growing and changing like puffs of vapour, now brown, now green; they grew, spread, shivered, and passed away. I saw huge buildings rise up faint and fair, and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed, melting and flowing under my eyes.

At first I hardly thought of stopping, hardly thought of anything but these new sensations. But presently a fresh series of impressions grew up in my mind – a certain curiosity and with it a certain dread. And so my mind came round to the business of stopping.

I lugged over the lever. The time machine went reeling over, and I was flung headlong through the air. There was the sound of a clap of thunder in my ears. I may have been stunned for a moment.

Presently I remarked that the confusion in my ears was gone. A pitiless hail was hissing around me. I was on what seemed to be a little lawn, surrounded by rhododendron bushes. As the columns of hail grew thinner, I saw a colossal carved figure. It was of white marble, in shape something like a winged sphinx, but the wings, instead of being carried vertically at the sides, were spread so that it seemed to hover. The face was towards me; the sightless eyes seemed to watch me; there was the faint shadow of a smile on the lips.

As I looked up at the crouching white shape, the full audacity of my voyage came suddenly upon me. What might appear when that hazy curtain of hail was withdrawn? What might have happened to men? What if the race had developed into something inhuman, unsympathetic, and overwhelmingly powerful?

Already I saw other vast shapes – huge buildings with intricate parapets and tall columns. I was seized with fear. I felt naked in a strange world. I set my teeth and grappled fiercely with the machine. It gave under my desperate efforts and turned over.

But with this recovery of the machine my courage returned. I looked more curiously and less fearfully at this world of the remote future. In a circular opening, high up in the wall of the nearer house, I saw a group of figures clad in rich, soft robes. They had seen me, and their faces were directed towards me.

Then I heard voices approaching me. Coming through the bushes by the White Sphinx were the heads and shoulders of men running.