

In the summer of 1899, as rumors of strange celestial activity reached the ears of European powers, an unprecedented event unfolded in the heavily fortified borderlands between Imperial Germany and France.

General Charles Lanrezac, hastily dispatched from Paris to assess the situation, arrived at Fort Douaumont just as the Martian cylinder plummeted from the sky. Peering through his binoculars, he muttered, "*Mon Dieu, c'est donc vrai.* The astronomers weren't mistaken."

Across the border, German Colonel General Alfred von Schlieffen rallied his troops. "*Meine Herren, wir stehen vor einem Feind, wie wir ihn noch nie gesehen haben. Aber denken Sie daran, diese Befestigungen haben Jahrhunderte überdauert. Sie werden auch heute nicht fallen!*"

As the cylinder's hatch creaked open, revealing the first tentacled Martian, a hail of artillery fire erupted from both sides of the border. The invader's heat-ray lashed out, incinerating the nearest gun emplacement, but the sheer volume of fire from the fortresses proved overwhelming. The Martian fighting-machine stumbled and crashed to the ground, its metal legs buckling under the onslaught.

Lanrezac allowed himself a moment of satisfaction. "Our fortifications have held. But this is only the beginning," he warned his staff.

His words proved prophetic as a second cylinder streaked across the sky, landing with precision amidst the chaos of the battlefield. This time, the Martians were prepared. As the hatch opened, a thick, oily black smoke billowed forth, engulfing the nearest fortifications.

"*Masques à gaz!*" shouted Lanrezac, but it was too late for many. The poisonous fog seeped through every crevice, suffocating defenders by the hundreds.

Taking advantage of the confusion, three Martian tripods emerged, their heat-rays cutting swathes through the defenders' lines. It seemed nothing could stop their advance.

Just as hope began to fade, the thunder of approaching trains echoed across the battlefield. Reinforcements had arrived – French Zouaves from Paris and Prussian Guards from Berlin, setting aside their differences to face the common foe.

The battle raged for days, with neither side gaining a clear advantage. Lanrezac coordinated with his German counterparts, orchestrating a defense that matched the Martians' technological superiority with human tenacity and numbers. The fields between Metz and Verdun became a hellscape of cratered earth, burning metal, and the cries of the wounded from two nations and two worlds.

As the fifth day dawned, with both sides on the verge of exhaustion, a strange sound filled the air. It was not the scream of shells or the hum of heat-rays, but a pitiful wailing from within the Martian machines.

One by one, the tripods began to sway erratically. Their movements became sluggish, their attacks uncoordinated. Finally, with an ear-splitting crash, the first fighting-machine toppled to the ground.

General Lanrezac cautiously approached the fallen invader, revolver in hand. Peering inside the shattered cockpit, he saw the Martian pilot writhing in agony, overcome by some unseen affliction. Von Schlieffen joined him, observing the scene with a grim smile.

*"Es scheint,"* said von Schlieffen, turning to Lanrezac, *"dass die Erde selbst zu unserer Verteidigung gekommen ist. Diese Eindringlinge waren nicht auf unsere kleinsten Verbündeten vorbereitet – unsere Mikroben."*

As realization dawned, a cheer went up from the battered but unbroken defenders. The Martian threat had been vanquished, not by the might of empires, but by the invisible guardians that had protected Earth for eons.

In the aftermath, as the smoke cleared and the dead were buried, French and German soldiers stood side by side, marveling at the fallen Martian machines. Lanrezac, ever the strategist, began to ponder how this shared experience might reshape the future of European relations. Little did he know that this cosmic incursion would indeed alter the course of history in the coming century.