



War of the Worlds: The Radio Show that Changed the World

H. G. Wells, Howard Koch (adaptation)

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This is the "so-called" reason the government won't reveal all they know about UFOs. The panic from this broadcast was significant. Although Orson Welles, Mercury Theatre and the Columbia Broadcasting System couldn't "soap the windows" of their listeners the night before Halloween back in 1938, they could annihilate the world for them. And that's exactly what they did with this radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's famous novel, *War of the Worlds*. The adaptation was written by Howard Koch, and it was realistic enough to panic some listeners who tuned in too late to realize the broadcast was merely a prank. Koch used his medium to good effect, couching the first part of his drama as a series of special news reports interrupting a "regular" program of dance music. These updates on the seemingly innocent scientific oddity taking place on Mars served to pique interest, which Koch quickly built on with breathtaking, on-the-scene reports from Grover's Mill. How could listeners help but perch on the edge of their seats as Carl Phillips coolly intoned phrases such as, "I'll give you every detail as long as I can talk...?"

As the Martians spread their terror throughout New Jersey, Koch jacked up the tension using radio reports from the infantry and air force. These messages would ominously fall silent as the troops engaged the invaders, occasionally preceded by a telling, "Only one thing left..." Koch then used the show's intermission to segue into the first-person account of the "end of the world" by Pearson, a haunting and poignant monologue spoken by Welles.

It's easy to see why this broadcast created genuine panic back in 1938, and today it still stands as one of the most exhilarating SF radio shows in history. It is easily equal to Wells's original masterpiece.

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