

OCT
30
1938

[On Oct. 30th 1938, Orson] Welles introduced his radio play with a spoken introduction, followed by an announcer reading a weather report. [...]

5 An announcer broke in to report that “Professor Farrell of the Mount Jenning Observatory” had detected explosions on the planet Mars. Then the dance music came back on, followed by another interruption in which listeners were informed that a large meteor had crashed into a farmer’s field in Grovers Mills, New Jersey.

15 Soon, an announcer was at the crash site describing a Martian emerging from a large metallic cylinder. “Good heavens,” he declared, “something’s wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now here’s another and another one and another one. They look like tentacles to me... I can see the thing’s body now. It’s large, large as a bear. It glistens like wet leather. But that face, it... it... ladies and gentlemen, it’s indescribable. I can hardly force myself to keep looking at it, it’s so awful. [...]

25 Soon “Martian cylinders” landed in Chicago and St. Louis. The radio play was extremely realistic, with Welles employing sophisticated sound effects and his actors doing an excellent job portraying terrified announcers and other characters. An announcer reported that widespread panic had broken out in the vicinity of the landing sites, with thousands

30 desperately trying to flee. In fact, that was not far from the truth.

35 Perhaps as many as a million radio listeners believed that a real Martian invasion was underway. Panic broke out across the country. In New Jersey, terrified civilians jammed highways seeking to escape the alien marauders. People begged police for gas masks to save them from the toxic gas and asked electric companies to turn off the power so that the Martians wouldn’t see their lights. One woman ran into an Indianapolis church where evening services were being held and yelled, “New York has been destroyed! It’s the end of the world! Go home and prepare to die!”

45 When news of the real-life panic leaked into the CBS studio, Welles went on the air as himself to remind listeners that it was just fiction. There were rumors that the show caused suicides, but none were ever confirmed. The Federal Communications Commission investigated the program but found no law was broken. Networks did agree to be more cautious in their programming in the future. Orson Welles feared that the controversy generated by *War of the Worlds* would ruin his career. In fact, the publicity helped land him a contract with a Hollywood studio, and in 1941 he directed, wrote, produced, and starred in *Citizen Kane*—a movie that many have called the greatest American film ever made.

55 “Welles Scares Nation”, *History.com*, 2009.

PRACTISE THE METHODS

GLOBAL COMPREHENSION

1. anticipate from the dates, the title, the layout
2. Read the first 2 paragraphs and use different colours to highlight : people (WHO) – places (WHERE) – dates (WHEN) – the event (WHAT)
3. Go through the text and highlight people and places
Then give a title to each paragraph

DETAILED COMPREHENSION

1. go through the text and underline everything that is real in red
2. go through the text and underline everything that is fake in green
3. What were the reactions of the radio listeners ?
4. What made the story realistic ?
5. What did Orson Welles do when he heard about the reactions of the listeners ?
6. What consequences did this event have on Orson Welles career ?
7. What impact did this event have on American media of the time ?

Let's talk this out !

1. Why did people react the way they did ?
2. Do you find this story plausible ? Why ? Why not ?
3. Could this type of event still happen today ? Why ? Why not ?

