

Anyone tuning in late to *Mercury Theatre on the Air* - the night of October 30, 1938 - would have missed the episode's introduction.

Those late-arriving listeners would not have realized they were about to hear a reworking of *The War of the Worlds*, a dystopia/science-fiction novel by H.G. Wells.

The reworked story, and the way it was presented by Orson Welles and his team, was so dramatically effective that millions of Americans believed they were listening to real-time events. It "freaked-out" many, many people. That, at least, is how the national press reported the situation.

The next day Welles held a press conference, to tell everyone what he was up to. Twenty years later, he admitted to additional motives.

In this clip, people who were impacted by [the actual radio broadcast](#) explain how it affected them (and their families) - and - Orson Welles fills-in some important details.

However ... many decades after the broadcast ... we learn that far fewer people were actually fooled by the radio play than were fooled by the national press:

How did the story of panicked listeners begin? Blame America's newspapers.

Radio had siphoned off advertising revenue from print during the Depression, badly damaging the newspaper industry. So the papers seized the opportunity presented by Welles's programme, perhaps to discredit radio as a source of news. The newspaper industry sensationalized the panic to prove to advertisers, and regulators, that radio management was irresponsible and not to be trusted. (See "[The Myth of the War of the Worlds Panic](#)," an October 28, 2013 article by Jefferson Pooley and Michael J. Socolow published in Slate.)

Professors Pooley and Socolow are on to something here. If we go back to a *New York Times* editorial, published on 1 November 1938 - two days after the broadcast - we read these words:

Radio is new but it has adult responsibilities. It has not mastered itself or the material it uses. It does many things which the newspapers learned long ago not to do, such as mixing its news and advertising... (Quoted in *Getting It Wrong: Debunking the Greatest Myths in American Journalism*, by W. Joseph Campbell, [at page 41](#).)

This is the same newspaper which used this front-page headline to report on the alleged panic occurring at, or about, the time of the broadcast:

Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact



Maybe ... but, then again ... maybe not.

See, also:

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 1](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 2](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 3](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 4](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 5](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 6](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 7](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 8](#)

[The Night that Panicked America, Part 9](#)

Credits:

Clip online, courtesy YouTube.

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See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/War-of-the-Worlds-Interviews-with-Orson-Welles>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/War-of-the-Worlds-Interviews-with-Orson-Welles>

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