

# The Martians have landed

Tuesday 31 October 2006

It happened sixty-eight years ago. On 30 October 1938, strange explosions were observed on the surface of the planet Mars. There were also reports of a meteorite landing in New Jersey in the United States. But then it became clear that it was not a meteorite, but a space ship carrying Martian invaders. A crowd of people gathered around the place where the spaceship had landed. They included a radio reporter who broadcast live descriptions of the event. The Martians however had other ideas; they turned their Heat Ray guns on the people, killing many of them.



More Martian space ships then landed. The US armed forces tried to stop the advance of the invaders, but in vain. The Martians had poison gas, which they sprayed into the air. Many people fled their homes and gathered in churches to pray. The Martians entered New York City. A radio reporter on the top of the CBS building in New York described the scene live to horrified radio listeners until he, too, was killed by the cloud of poison gas.

Did this really happen? Well, no, actually. What really happened was this. In 1898, the English author H G Wells published a science fiction novel called *The War of the Worlds*, about a Martian invasion of the earth. Later the American writer Howard Koch turned the novel into a radio play. The play took the form of “news flashes” and live reports, as if the events it described were really happening. The American radio station CBS broadcast the play on 30 October 1938. Many listeners panicked because they were convinced that the United States had indeed been invaded. It was a very interesting early example of the power of communication media such as radio (and later television). Today the play is regarded as one of the classics of radio broadcasting. Recordings of it are still re-broadcast from time to time, and you can find it also on the internet. Good-bye.

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The picture is of the famous actor and director Orson Welles, who worked with Howard Koch in writing and directing the radio play, and also appeared in it.

<http://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/warworlds/warw.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_War\\_of\\_the\\_Worlds\\_%28radio%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_War_of_the_Worlds_%28radio%29)

<http://www.mercurytheatre.info/>