

THE SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTER

An Empress Publication

Dedicated to Orson Welles

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MALIGNANT MARTIAN MONSTERS MENACE MIGHTY METROPOLIS!
Or, Wells, Welles, Well!

The time was Sunday, Oct. 30, between the hours of 8 & 9 P.M. (EST). Questing radio listeners turned their dials in search of entertainment. As they reached the Columbia Broadcasting System's wavelength they heard things like this:

" . . . huge flaming object, believed to be a meteorite, fell on a farm in the neighborhood of Grovers Mill, N. J. . . . like a huge cylinder . . . this is terrific! The top is beginning to rotate like a screw! . . . Something's wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake . . . eyes are black and gleam like a serpent . . . monster . . . !" Then followed the announcer's voice, telling of the instantaneous destruction of 200 spectators, other announcers telling the best routes out of New Jersey, the voice of the "Secretary of the Interior" speaking of the graveness of the situation, descriptions of encounters between the U. S. Army and the monsters from Mars. Radio stations, police precincts, newspaper offices were deluged with thousands of phone calls, all demanding to know if it were true what they said about Jersey; honestagawd, had the Redmen landed & had they the situation well in hand?; were the poison gases loosed liable to spread as far as Queens?; what about the ship that sailed up the bay & blew Manhattan off the map?

Those who had listened to the program from the beginning were, of course, aware of the fact that all this aerial agitation was only (!) Orson Welles' & his Mercury Theater of the Air presenting a streamlined, 1939 version of H. G. Wells' 41-year-old novel of the first Martian invasion, "The War of the Worlds."

Welles, however, was too realistic. Fault One was that he presented the program as tho the events were actual happenings, with feverish announcers interrupting dance music, interviews with scientists in their observatories, all-too-scary sound effects, instructions to listeners as to how best avoid the gas barrages & heat rays, which highways to use in evacuation of towns & use of the names of actual places in vivid description.

The Martian "meteor" was supposed to have fallen on the Wilmuth Farm, in Grovers Mill, N. J. Both of these Welles thought to be fictitious names. There is, however, a town called Grover's Mill, N. J., & there, a Wilson Farm! The coincidence, linked with the uneasiness caused by the recent European war scare and the inability of some people to listen to radio programs from the beginning, caused thousands in the U. S. & Canada to flee their homes, many with damp cloths wrapped around their faces as protection from the "poison gas."

Grotesque were "eye-witness" reports of persons who "saw" the Martian space-ship, the destruction, & the invaders themselves. A co-worker of ours who lives in Washington Heights tells of a screaming woman who ran up to him on the street & waved wildly across

the Hudson. "Look!" she yelled. "They're coming over the Pali-
sades!" They--of course--weren't.

NBC went so far as to recognize the existence of CBS by allow-
ing Walter Winchell to reassure listeners that Mars & Earth had
not phfft.

Orson Welles was as surprised as anyone at the outcome of "just
another broadcast." He had thought the public would regard it as
pretty dull stuff . . . Four undergraduates at Princeton University
organized the League for Interplanetary Defense, demanding that the
F.B.I. investigate interplanetary spy activities & that the U. S.
be crossed with Maginot Lines to insure safety from without. . .
Providence, R. I., 's Brown University awarded Orson Welles the P.T.
Barnum Memorial Award given each year to "that individual who best
plays the American public for the suckers they really are" because
"he landed his army of Martians on the Jersey mud flats and fright-
ened an entire nation out of a night's sleep." It further suggested
that every person who complained to the Federal Communications Com-
mission about the broadcast be awarded a Buck Rogers air gun.

Your editor has gone to great expense (three cents) to secure
a copy of the script of the program that caused all the furore.
Orson Welles' "The War of the Worlds" will appear, within a reason-
able time, as a large-sized mimeographed booklet which (advt.) every-
one, fan or no, will deem an invaluable possession.

PRESTIDIGITATION

One definition of which is "jugglery." An egregious example of
which, with words, appeared in Fantasy News #18, wherein the editors
stated "We wish to thank the precastinators (sic) of the confer-
ence." Obvious misspelling might have been a typing error but what
odd altered meaning has been given the word? Shade of Gertrude
Stein! (altho, strictly speaking, the epithet cannot apply, since
Gerty is not a ghosty--even if her stuff is ghastly). If we were
the Philly Fellows we shouldn't feel very flattered to be described
as those who "deferred, delayed, postponed & put off" the Confer-
ence--! Don't take our word for it--consult Webster! fja

"INTERPLANETARY TOURS--MAKE RESERVATIONS NOW FOR 1939!"

The New York World's Fair has signed a contract with Messmore &
Damon for a dramatization of Alex Raymond's "Flash Gordon." It is
reported that this concession will take visitors on a rocket-ship
tour to Mars & Venus to visit the planets' inhabitants & cities of
advanced science. No mention is made of Mr Ming's Mongo.

LONE STAR PUBLICATIONS

The most pretentious magazette of Lone Star Publications (Dale
Hart & Percy T. Wilkinson) will be The Fantasy Triangle, which will
be the organ of the Tri-Cities SFL & contain 20 or more large
pages; price 10¢. Art work will be by Wilkinson & Charles Burton
Pope. The magazine will appear bi-monthly. . . The Texas Fan & En-
igmatic, both to be circulated thru the FAPA, but also available to
non-members at 5¢ a copy & 20¢ per year, respectively. Having the
same illustrators as The Triangle, former, 8-paged, latter, 6. dh

Richard Wilson, Jr.