

# The Infamous "War of the Worlds" Radio Broadcast Was a Magnificent Fluke



*Orson Welles and his colleagues scrambled to pull together the show; they ended up writing pop culture history, - By A. Brad Schwartz, May 6, 2015*

On Halloween morning, 1938, Orson Welles awoke to find himself the most talked about man in America. The night before, Welles and his Mercury Theatre on the Air had performed a radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, converting the 40-year-old novel into fake news bulletins describing a Martian invasion of New Jersey.

Some listeners mistook those bulletins for the real thing, and their anxious phone calls to police, newspaper offices, and radio stations convinced many journalists that the show had caused nationwide hysteria. By the next morning, the 23-year-old Welles's face and name were on the front pages of newspapers coast-to-coast, along with headlines about the mass panic his CBS broadcast had allegedly inspired.

Welles barely had time to glance at the papers, leaving him with only a horribly vague sense of what he had done to the country. He'd heard reports of mass stampedes, of suicides, and of angered listeners threatening to shoot him on sight. "If I'd planned to wreck my career," he told several people at the time, "I couldn't have gone about it better." With his livelihood (and possibly even his freedom) on the line, Welles went before dozens of reporters, photographers, and newsreel cameramen at a hastily arranged press conference in the CBS building. Each journalist asked him some variation of the same basic question: Had he intended, or did he at all anticipate, that *War of the Worlds* would throw its audience into panic?

That question would follow Welles for the rest of his life, and his answers changed as the years went on—from protestations of innocence to playful hints that he knew exactly what he was doing all along.

(Source : <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/infamous-war-worlds-radio-broadcast-was-magnificent-fluke-180955180/?no-ist>)