



Text Version of Audio Story: The War of the Worlds

On Sunday evening, October 30 1938, millions of radio listeners were on the edge of their seats as they listened to reporter Carl Phillips and his live coverage of events unfolding on a farm in Grover's Mill, New Jersey.

"Ladies and gentleman, this is the most terrifying thing I've ever witnessed. Wait a minute, someone's crawling, someone or something. I can see peering out of the black hole two luminous disks. Are they eyes? It might be a face. It might be ... good heavens. Someone, something's wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now it's another one and another one and another one. They look like tentacles to me. There, I can see the thing's body. It's large as a bear, and it glistens like wet leather. But that face ... ladies and gentleman, it's indescribable."

As many in the audience listened to Mr. Phillips' report the landing of an invading Martian force here on Earth, the panic was beginning to well-up inside them. Phillips is abruptly cut off as if something terrible has just happened. His ability to broadcast has been knocked off the air. There is a silence as engineers back at the station tried to re-establish the connection. Soon an announcer from the studio comes on with what has happened. The invading alien force has used its death ray.

"Ladies and gentleman, I have just been handed a message that came in from Grover's Mill by telephone. Just one moment please. At least 40 people, including six state troopers, lie dead in a field east of the village of Grover's Mill. Their bodies burned and destroyed beyond all possible recognition."

Orson Welles' radio broadcast of The War of the Worlds sounded so real ... a newscast with reporters in the field and expert interviews. It sounded so real, Americans were out of control with fear.

The New York Times reported national bedlam. In the greater New York City area, people packed up their belongings wrapped wet towels on their heads and covered their faces with handkerchiefs as a defense to the poison gas.

San Francisco: The general impression of listeners seemed to be that an overwhelming force had invaded the United States from the air and was in the process of destroying New York and threatening to move westward.

St Louis: Men and women clustered in the streets in residential areas to discuss what they should do in the face of the sudden war.

In New Orleans, a general impression prevailed that New Jersey had been devastated by the invaders.

Baltimore: A woman engaged passage on an airliner for New York, where her daughter was in school.

Fayetteville, North Carolina: People went to newspaper offices in tears, seeking information.

Providence, Rhode Island: Weeping and hysterical women swamped the switchboard of the Providence Journal for details of the massacre and destruction at New York, and officials of the electric company received scores of calls urging them to turn off all lights so that the city would be safe from the enemy.

Atlanta reporters: Monsters, and almost everything and anywhere from 40 to 7,000 people reported killed.

Birmingham, Alabama, people gathered in groups and prayed. Indianapolis, a woman ran into a church screaming, *"New York destroyed. It's the end of the world! You might as well go home to die!"* Services were dismissed immediately.

Students at Brevard College North Carolina were fighting for telephones to ask their parents to come and get them.

A man in Pittsburgh rushed home and found his wife in the bathroom, a bottle of poison in her hand, and screaming, *"I'd rather die this way than like that!"*

Orson Welles had thought of cancelling the broadcast several days before, as he believed it was so far-fetched, no one would pay attention to it.

I'm the American Storyteller.