On Sunday, October 30, 1938, millions of radio listeners were shocked when radio news alerts announced the arrival of Martians. They panicked when they learned of the Martians' ferocious and seemingly unstoppable attack on Earth. Many ran out of their homes screaming while others packed up their cars and fled.

Though what the radio listeners heard was a portion of Orson Welles' adaptation of the well-known book, War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells, many of the listeners believed what they heard on the radio was real.

The Idea

Before the era of T.V., people sat in front of their radios and listened to music, news reports, plays and various other programs for entertainment. In 1938, the most popular radio program was the "Chase and Sanborn Hour" which aired on Sunday evenings at 8 p.m. The star of the show was ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy.

Unfortunately for the Mercury group, headed by dramatist Orson Welles, their show, "Mercury Theatre on the Air," aired on another station at the very same time as the popular "Chase and Sanborn Hour." Welles, of course, tried to think of ways to increase his audience, hoping to take away listeners from the "Chase and Sanborn Hour."

For the Mercury group's Halloween show that was to air on October 30, 1938, Welles decided to adapt H. G. Wells's well-known novel, War of the Worlds, to radio. Radio adaptations and plays up to this point had often seemed rudimentary and awkward. Instead of lots of pages as in a book or through visual and auditory presentations as in a play, radio programs could only be heard (not seen) and were limited to a short period of time (often an hour, including commercials).