

A War of The Worlds Calling Script

PROLOGUE

In the darkness, the sound of a radio turning on.

A bit of static.

Marc enters followed by reporters *Then, a voice.*

VOICE

October 31, 1938.

The lights snap on, and Orson Welles stands in the middle of a cloud of reporters. He speaks with a measured ignorance as the members of the press frantically scribble down his words.

WELLES

We are deeply shocked and deeply regretful about the results of last night's broadcast. It came as rather a great surprise to us that a story about a mythical invasion by monsters from the planet Mars should have such a profound effect upon radio listeners. Our program seemed to us to be clearly in the realm of the fairy tale. I'm deeply regretful that this is not so.

The reporters all jockey for his attention. One wins out.

REPORTER

Do you think, Mr. Welles, that you might have taken unfair advantage of the public last night in using the method of your broadcast as a conveyance for authentic news?

WELLES

I don't believe that I have, since it is a method used by many other radio programs. I'm terribly shocked by the effect it's had, but I don't believe its method is peculiar to the Mercury Theater's presentation.

REPORTER

You think there oughta be a law against such enactments as we've had last night.

WELLES

I don't know what the legislation would be. I know that almost everybody in radio

SQ 10 Preshow

LQ 1 Preshow

SQ 20 Preshow out

LQ2 House Speech

LQ 2.5 Applause sign

LQ 3House Half/ preshow
out

LQ4 Black

SQ 30 as they enter
LQ 4.5 (subs 13,14,15)
flash go with Voice
(camera flash)
After the DATE
LQ5 go when Marc Set
after flash es

would do almost anything to avert the kind of thing that has happened. Myself included. We simply...radio is new, and we're learning the effect it has on people. We learned a terrible lesson.

REPORTER

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Do you think that this will cause the curbing of radio bulletins on the air?

WELLES

I simply can't imagine. It's the wisdom of radio executives and an organized public that will decide these things. It's not up to me. I'm the accused.

REPORTER

Mr. Welles, I remember the bulletins that came over the radio in Harlem three nights ago during all the rioting. I should say that your presentation last night was more dramatic and more realistic than the real news I heard then. In view of that, don't you think that somebody in your company would have been able to predict the reaction that would have occurred here and throughout the United States?

WELLES

Well, every radio program tries to be more dramatic than life. As every play tries to be more dramatic than life. Not less so.

Somewhere in the back of the theater, a man's voice is heard.

MAN

Don't listen to him! He's lying!

The reporters, and Welles, stand up and take notice, casting their eyes to the back of the house.

MAN

He knew exactly what he was doing! Don't let him fool you!

We see him now. A young Black man. He looks beaten and weathered in a torn button down shirt half-tucked into his slacks.

WELLES

Hey...listen...

He forces his way through the crowd and confronts Welles. He fights through his own anger to be understood.

MAN

I saw it. She saw it too. And now...and now, she'll never be the same.

A commotion. He sobs great, heavy sobs. Welles addresses the reporters.

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WELLES

It was fake! I assure you. It was all a fake—

MAN

She'll never be the same! And it's all your fault!

Welles takes a step toward the man, who is shaking with fury.

WELLES

Will you listen to me?! Please! Will you just listen?!

SQ 45

LQ 6 Blackout

The man suddenly lunges for him, punching Welles in the eye. There is pandemonium, but only for a brief moment before the lights abruptly snap to black.

Over the blackness plays the titanic theme song for the Mercury Theater on the Air, all horns and strings and bombast. Over that, we hear the same voice from the top of the prologue.

VOICE

Penfold Theatre presents: *A War of the Worlds* by Jarrett King. Ryan Crowder and Nathan Jerkins, producers.

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THE BROADCAST

Lights rise on the lobby just outside a recording studio at CBS.

VOICE

October 30, 1938.

Canada Lee, a Black man in his early forties, sits on a couch, reading The Harlem Times. The news drones faintly out of a radio on an end table in the lobby.

Wardell Saunders, a Black man in his early twenties, enters. He is the same man who confronted Orson Welles in the prologue, only here, he is far less threatening, almost docile.

He sees Canada and observes him for a moment. Canada doesn't move or take his eyes off the paper. Wardell creeps closer, assuming himself to be within Canada's periphery, but Canada remains still, his eyes glued to the newspaper.

Wardell cocks his head in confusion. Then turns and walks out of the room. The news continues creeping out of the speaker. Then, Wardell re-enters, a little more loudly and conspicuously. Canada is stock still.

He walks over to Canada, and stares at him for a moment, smiling, flabbergasted. He takes off his coat and sits at an adjacent armchair and marvels at Canada, who has not seemed to notice him at all.

Then, Wardell gets an idea. He stands up and ducks behind his chair. He hunkers down, and rises slowly, ready to give Canada a scare. Just as he's about to yell "Boo!"...

CANADA

Shit is messed up, man.

Wardell yelps and falls over in fright.

CANADA

The hell's wrong with you?

WARDELL

Nothing, just... *(He looks back at the door, then to Canada, puzzled.)*

Did you... CANADA

You see the paper?

LQ 7 (as soon as voice is done) Lobby

SQ 55 immediately following SQ45

WARDELL

Mostly just listening to the paper these days.

CANADA

(He chuckles.) You youngbloods.

WARDELL

Hard to cook bacon with the news in your hand.

CANADA

Good way to practice your cold read.

WARDELL

I think my cold read's fine.

CANADA

Keep telling yourself that.

Canada reads from the paper.

CANADA

"O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath--
America will be!"

WARDELL

What's that?

CANADA

A newspaper.

WARDELL

Canada, I'm not an idiot.

CANADA

“Let America be America Again.” Langston Hughes. (*He holds up the paper.*)
Today’s issue of The Harlem Times. Black-owned publication. Established in 1922.

WARDELL

I know The Harlem Times, man. I don’t need a lecture.

CANADA

How about a magic trick, then? Listen.

Canada turns the dial on the radio monitor in the lobby. Lights rise on the studio, where Lois Ballard, whose voice we’ve been hearing over the radio, is reading the news. Above the studio hangs a sign that reads ON AIR (which is currently illuminated) and APPLAUSE, which illuminates when the audience should applaud.

LOIS

...a brief thunderstorm expected tomorrow evening ahead of the cold front. And now an update on the rioting in Harlem.

Canada reads from The Harlem Times.

CANADA

“...the situation in Harlem.”

LOIS

Police are still making arrests in connection to the looting—

CANADA

“—demonstration—”

LOIS

—that occurred in the largely negro—

CANADA

“—African-American—”

LOIS

—neighborhood.

CANADA

LQ 8
SQ 60

“One man has died as a result of the protest, where demonstrators took to the streets with signs and chants.”

LOIS

One man is dead after armed bands of negro guerillas, swinging crowbars and clubs, prowled through the Harlem streets.

CANADA

“The chaos resulted after 16-year-old Black Puerto Rican boy Lino Rivera went missing.”

LOIS

The mob-mad streets of Harlem erupted after false claims that 16-year old mulatto Lino Rivera went missing—

CANADA

“—at the Kress dime store, where Rivera was threatened by white shop owners after he attempted to steal a penknife.”

LOIS

—after the owners of the Kress dime store reprimanded the thief.

CANADA

“Nearly 300 angry men and women—”

LOIS

—The mob—

CANADA

“—unaware that the boy had been found unharmed—”

LOIS

—unaware that the boy had been found unharmed—

CANADA

“—became agitated by the sight of a hearse—”

LOIS

“—ambulance—”

CANADA

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“—that had arrived on the scene.”

Canada lowers the volume on the radio.

SQ 65

LQ 9

CANADA

Ta-da.

WARDELL

Pulling a rabbit out of your ass would have been more entertaining.

The door opens. Edna Thomas, a Black woman in her late thirties, enters.

EDNA

That new security guard really pisses me off.

WARDELL

Evening, Edna.

EDNA

I mean, I walk in the building, and this baboon’s ass is already motioning for the custodial closet before I even get to the desk. I say, “No, sir. I’m headed to Floor 12, Studio B. The Mercury Theatre on the Air.” He replies with the most elaborate “Huuuh?!” I’ve ever heard. I repeat to him: “Floor 12, Studio B.” Then he adjusts his glasses, real big-like, like he was trying to show the back row of Madison Square Garden how glasses work. “My mistake, ma’am. Gosh, one of these days I’ll make it over to that dern optometrist.”

CANADA

Doesn’t he know you’re Edna Thomas? Dame of the negro stage, and the best Lady Macbeth to ever tread the negro boards?

EDNA

Oh, I was about to screw my courage to his sticking-place. He laughs and says to me, “I’m just gonna start calling you Mabel from now on. That’ll keep me straight.” Naturally, I ask, “Who’s Mabel?” He goes: “My buddy Pete’s live-in help. She’s

wonderful. Looks just like you, only more top-heavy!” Now, while I’m busy gathering the remnants of my jaw off the floor, he’s scribbling on a piece of paper. Hands it to me, and it’s got my destination written on it. “Floor 12, Studio B,” he says. I smile, say, “Thank you,” get on the elevator, and blow my nose with it.

WARDELL

(To Canada.) You shouldn’t say “Macbeth” in a theatre.

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CANADA

This isn’t a theatre. It’s a circus. But I can see why you’d be confused.

Edna drops her bag and flops down on the couch next to Canada.

CANADA

Big night tonight.

WARDELL

Think so? Dumb Martian story set in jolly old England’s gonna pull a crowd?

CANADA

It’s gonna have to.

EDNA

What was last week’s number?

CANADA

Terrible.

WARDELL

Something like 42,000.

EDNA

Really?

CANADA

Word is, if we don’t break 100,000 listeners tonight, we’re all canned.

WARDELL

Canned?!

CANADA

Fired.

WARDELL

I know what “canned” means! That can’t happen. My acting career is just starting to take off. EDNA

12

My landlord’s one late deposit away from booting my ass.

CANADA

It’s bad all over. You think I wanna go back to understudying?

WARDELL

Well, it was fun while it lasted.

The door opens. Ollie Simmons, a Black man in his early thirties, enters. He carries a huge bag full of odd noisemaking devices. It looks pretty ridiculous.

OLLIE

Is that security guard on drugs?

WARDELL

We’re finished, Ollie!

CANADA

Not yet! Don’t count us out.

OLLIE

Say, Wardell, what’s stuck to my shoe? Been troubling me all the way from the elevator. *Wardell reaches down and grabs the wadded up piece of paper. He opens it up and reads:*

WARDELL

“Floor 12, Studio B.” Hey, that’s our studio!

Edna leans back with a smile.

EDNA

Oops.

WARDELL

It’s an omen! Someone’s coming for us! They know we can’t pull 100,000. Some big tough is gonna be waiting outside to serve us our walking papers as soon as we go off the air!

CANADA

Um...walking papers?

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WARDELL

I should have known. I should have known the end was near. Back to eating ketchup sandwiches for dinner...

CANADA

Wardell...

WARDELL

Gonna have to pawn my watch, my radio...

CANADA

Wardell...

WARDELL

...the engagement ring I just bought for Josephine!

A tambourine falls out of Ollie’s bag-o-stuff and crashes to the floor. Lois clocks this from inside the studio.

CANADA

If I know Orson, and I do, he’s got a plan.

EDNA

God help us.

LQ 9.5

Lights shift from the lobby to the studio. Lois has wrapped up her report and reads an advertisement. She is bright and clear on the mic, though a little green.

LOIS

And now, a word from our sponsor. We all know a dog is man's best friend, and a dog's best friend is the treat you give him after he rolls over or plays dead or fetches that tennis ball from all the way behind the lawn mower. Why not give Fido the best, with Powell's Pure Beef Sticks. Your pup will love the taste of Powell's Pure Beef just as sure as he loves that afternoon sunbath or the rear end of the neighbor's pooch. Powell's Pure Beef Sticks are 100% authentic beef right off the cow. Dogs can't get enough of Powell's Pure Beef Sticks—just ask this one. *(Lois barks. She doesn't seem happy about it.)* Powell's Pure Beef Sticks. Wherever fine pet foods are sold. And now, we take you to the Marquee Ballroom for an interlude of music from Franklin Caldwell and his orchestra.

SQ 67

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Lois goes off the air, as indicated by the sign above the studio. Canada, Wardell, Edna and Ollie enter the studio.

OLLIE

Sorry, Lois!

LOIS

Don't worry about it, Ollie. What's playing tonight?

EDNA

The War of the Worlds.

LQ 10 Lights up on studio
(out on Lobby)

LOIS

Oh, the H.G. Wells story?

WARDELL

(Salty, in a British dialect:) Little green martians invading the English countryside. Riveting.

The actors begin preparing their stations for the night. Lois distributes water glasses to the actors' stations. Wardell begins setting up his foley table.

CANADA

(To Lois, re: Wardell.) Don't mind him. He's sour over the numbers. Can't blame the kid. You heard anything from the top?

LOIS

No. They don't tell me anything besides, "Little faster, Lois, we've got ads to sell," and "Smile a little, will ya?"

OLLIE

Smile?!

LOIS

Yeah. They say you can hear the smile over the radio, so I should practice around the office more.

EDNA

Sounds like these men need to practice a little couth.

OLLIE

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Couth?

EDNA

Decorum.

OLLIE

Oh, I agree. Let's get a fern in here. Or an oil painting. Really open up

the room. *Edna's eyes narrow at Ollie's comment.*

EDNA

Baby, no...

LOIS

Where's Orson? *(She catches herself.)* I mean, Mr. Welles?

CANADA

Let every man be master of his time. (He chuckles.) I wouldn't bat an eye if he came

bounding in at 7:59.

LOIS

Well, give him my best when you see him. And good luck to you all. I mean that sincerely. See you on the other side.

She exits. Wardell looks concerned.

WARDELL

“See you on the other side?” Other side of what? What’s she know that we don’t?!

EDNA

Can it, Wardell!!

John Houseman, a white man in his late thirties, enters with a bundle of scripts.

JOHN

Good evening, friends.

CANADA

New draft?

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JOHN

I made a few edits here and there. Mostly a few content notes from above. Turns out you can’t say “bumpkin” because they’re courting Country Crock as a sponsor.

Wardell gives Canada a look like, “Ask him! Ask him!” Canada pulls John aside.

CANADA

John. Be straight with me.

John pauses.

JOHN

It’s really not for me to say, Canny.

CANADA

Should I take that as a “Perhaps?”

JOHN

You can take that as a “Perhaps.”

Wardell shrinks off Canada’s expression, assuming the worst.

CANADA

Were such things here as we do speak about?

Or have we eaten on the insane root

That takes the reason prisoner?

JOHN

Really sorry, Canny.

John smiles regretfully and walks away. Just then, Officer Wrigley, a white police officer in his mid thirties, enters. He’s all smiles, but firm.

WRIGLEY

Pardon the interruption, folks.

EDNA

Oh no.

WRIGLEY

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(to Edna) Well, if it isn’t MABEL!

JOHN

Is there something I can do for you?

WRIGLEY

(Pointing to the actors) These yours?

JOHN

These actors are part of the cast of this show, if that’s what you’re asking.

WRIGLEY

Apologies, sir. I’m Officer Wrigley and I’m new to the front desk. Only been here a week, so I hope you’ll forgive my ignorance. It seems I have another one of yours here.

Or so he claimed after I stopped him as he was about to barge right past me. See, I gotta vet ‘em, you understand? Everyone that passes through those doors. Doesn’t matter who they are, I vet ‘em, and I vet ‘em pretty darn good if you ask my new superiors.

From the lobby, Orson Welles booms.

WELLES

This is a farce! John, tell this man who I am!

WRIGLEY

Easy there, bud. You know I’ve listened a couple times to this Mercury show. What’s it called?

JOHN

The Mercury Theatre on the Air.

WRIGLEY

That’s the one! What’s this week? The one about the, uh, cabin? My wife loves that book!

JOHN

That’s great, but it turns out, we have a show to run. So if you don’t mind, why don’t you invite Mr. Welles in so he can do his job.

WRIGLEY

I understand you fine folks have some business at hand, so I’ll be brief. Like I said, gotta vet ‘em. And when someone enters my building claiming to be the director of a show and they don’t look like no director I’ve seen, I gotta vet ‘em additionally you understand?

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Orson Welles is heard from the lobby.

WELLES

How about I direct my foot in your ass!

WRIGLEY

Is he always this charming?

WELLES

And it would seem that you decided to come all the way up here to do nothing other than prove your incompetence!

WRIGLEY

Okay, sir. You wanna play hardball? Why don't you come on in here and see if that pretty mug of yours jogs anyone's memory.

Orson Welles enters.

LQ 10.5 bump on door

WELLES

Allow me to reintroduce myself. My name is Orson Welles, Artistic Director of the Mercury Theatre on the Air.

CANADA

Officer, he is who he says he is.

WELLES

See?! That proves it! Now, if you please...

Officer Wrigley puts up a hand to silence him. He points to John.

WRIGLEY

What's your name?

JOHN

John.

WRIGLEY

John. I know you gotta get back to your employees here, so I don't wanna take up any more of your time. I promise, you do this for me, and I'll walk out of this room and leave you to your

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evening's work with no further hassle. All I need you to do is look into my eyes, and tell me, without a shadow of a doubt, that the man standing in that doorway is Orson Welles.

JOHN

Without a shadow of a doubt, that man is Orson Welles, Artistic Director of the Mercury Theatre on the Air, and my dear friend.

Officer Wrigley nods and backs away. He eyes everyone in the room, landing lastly on Orson Welles, still standing in the doorway.

WRIGLEY

You folks have a good show! Or, what do they say in the theatre? Ah, break a leg! I'll be listening!

He smiles and gestures for Welles to enter the room. He does, and Wrigley exits. Welles eyes his troops as he pulls a large soup can from his briefcase and holds it proudly.

LQ 10.6

WELLES

Behold your god!

The cast is a little dumbstruck.

EDNA

I can't eat before a show. Gasses me right up.

WELLES

We have a very important listener tonight, friends. John, you know Ernie Pryce, yes?

JOHN

Sure. Well, I mean, I know of Ernie. But I don't know know Ernie.

WELLES

Not many people know know Ernie Pryce.

WARDELL

Quarterback for the Bears, yeah?

WELLES

Head of Marketing at Campbell's Soup, Wardell. Don't be thick.

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WARDELL

Sorry.

WELLES

It's amazing who you might share a train ride with in this town. I'm riding home from the studio last night, and who should plop down next to me other than Ernie Pryce himself. Naturally I chatted him up, told him all about The Mercury. Turns out, he thinks it might be worth sticking the Campbell's name on a radio show to expand their reach into more homes.

JOHN

That's great news!

WELLES

Only, he's never listened to us! But I promised him he wouldn't be disappointed in what he heard if he tuned in tonight. Friends, let's not pretend this isn't the answer. Campbell's is the sponsor we've so desperately needed. So, tonight, we need to give Mr. Pryce something to sponsor. Here, ditch those scripts. Wardell, gimme a hand.

He goes around grabbing the actors' scripts off of their music stands. He tosses a bundle of scripts to Wardell who begins passing them out.

JOHN

Orson, I already edited those. Marketing signed off.

WELLES

Well, I signed off on these.

JOHN

What changes did you make?

WELLES

I believe the phrase is "a complete overhaul."

John flips through the pages, his mouth agape.

JOHN

Orson, have you lost your mind?!

WELLES

Yes! No one's going in for the old H.G. Wells story. Aliens terrorizing a bunch of tea-sipping dandies. I was up all last night and all of today hacking away at this.

JOHN

I can feel my job slipping through my fingers...

WELLES

This (*He taps the script.*) is what America needs to hear tonight. We're a country full of numbskulls. Idiot apes doing as we're told, dressing as we're told, believing as we're told without a moment's hesitation. We're on the brink of another world war and everyone wants to know when the next bomb's gonna drop and where it's gonna drop and what kind of aluminum underpants I need to buy to keep myself safe. Fear. It's our most powerful natural resource and no one knows that better than the suits on Madison Avenue and (*He points to his cast.*) us: a group of actors who've just closed the country's first all-Black Macbeth. Right now, if we got on that microphone and said to the American people "This just in: the person next you is secretly plotting to kill you," we'd be the only people left on earth, watching armageddon unfold on the other side of those windows. Our voices are the most devastating weapon on the planet, but we're still being treated like pawns. And now CBS wants to flick us off the board because we're not bringing them enough ears. They have no earthly idea who they've gone and messed with. So tonight, we're going to give them another one of their beloved news reports. We'll give them the weather, a little music, then this.

Welles holds his script high in the air like a sword. His actors are entranced. John, however...

JOHN

You're either an absolute genius or a mass murderer.

WELLES

This is America, John. I get to be both. And think of this: Kane. The Kane picture. We start with Campbell's soup, but from there, who knows who comes to court us? MGM, RKO, the president of the goddamn United States? We could be one night away from making the greatest film ever made. Just say the magic words, and we could get everything we ever wanted.

JOHN

I should say no.

WELLES
You should say no.

JOHN

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It's the sensible thing to do.

WELLES
But name one masterpiece that resulted from someone doing the sensible thing?

JOHN
If we fail?

WELLES
*Then we fail.
But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail.*

John takes a long, hard look at his friend. At all his friends. He shrugs and says:

JOHN
They would've sacked us anyhow.

He puts a hand on Welles' shoulder before walking out. Welles gets up on a chair and mounts the can of soup above the door to the studio.

WELLES
This is who we're praying to tonight, friends. For the next hour, we're all devout followers of the Church of Campbell's Soup. What do you say?

WARDELL
I'm in!

CANADA
Brilliant.

EDNA
Genius!

Ollie honks a horn in solidarity.

WELLES

Be bloody, bold, and resolute!

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Welles and his actors go to their stations and begin preparing for the broadcast. Very abruptly, Nathan Jerkins, Associate Artistic Director of Penfold Theatre, enters and crosses to the front of the stage. The house lights rise. Nathan speaks to the audience.

NATHAN

I'm so sorry. So sorry. *(He calls up to the booth.)* Maddy, can we hold, please? I apologize for the interruption, but one of our show's sponsors, Hindley Heating and Cooling, has been watching via livestream and has insisted that we inform you, and the rest of the livestreaming audience, that they have updated their promotion. I hope you can understand the need for this interruption...we rely so heavily on sponsorship in these uncertain times to keep our little ship in operation and to keep our actors happy, right Marc?

LQ 11 Find late (as if programming)

He nods at the actor playing Orson Welles, who, along with the rest of the cast onstage, is mortified.

NATHAN

Hindley Heating and Cooling has asked that I read the following brief advertisement. *(He reads.)* At Hindley Heating and Cooling, we understand that home is where the heart is. And without proper air conditioning during these summer months, home could be where the heat is. You don't become Central Texas' most reliable, prompt, and courteous HVAC company without years of a proven commitment to comfort. Now, *A War of the Worlds* audiences can enjoy 15% off all services with promo code WAR at checkout. Visit hindleyhc.com. Promo code: WAR.

LQ 11.5 Applause

The APPLAUSE sign illuminates. Perhaps the audience applauds.

NATHAN

All right. Maddy, go ahead and bring up the lights. Cast, y'all take it from wherever y'all want.

LQ 12

Lights snap back to the studio, and, after a few looks of "What the actual hell was that?!" exchanged among the cast, the play resumes. Ollie puts on a record, Duke

Ellington's 'Drop Me Off in Harlem'. Welles is busy coaching Wardell when John re-enters.

SQ 75- music

WELLES
Back so soon?

JOHN
Lois had a telegram waiting for me on my desk.

WELLES
From who?

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JOHN
Ernie Pryce.

WELLES
John!

JOHN
Said he'll be tuning in right at 8:00.

WELLES
Excellent!

JOHN
And next to that telegram was this memo. *(He hands a piece of paper to Welles.)* Benny Goodman's plane is stuck in Dallas, so all those listeners who thought they were tuning in to hear him play Carnegie Hall on NBC tonight are going to be treated to his last-minute replacement: Paulie Stetson.

WELLES
John, I could kiss you! Paulie Stetson is atrocious! We'll win the hour for sure!

JOHN
Hopefully we win the war. How are the troops?

WELLES
At the ready.

JOHN

One minute to air. Talk soon.

SQ80

WELLES

Thank you one.

John exits.

WELLES

To your positions!

The actors get in place. Ollie gets ready to fire up the theme music.

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CANADA

(To Wardell) You scared?

WARDELL

Me? Nope.

CANADA

Then you're a bigger idiot than I realized.

EDNA

This is thrilling! I haven't felt this alive since my first divorce!

CANADA

Make no mistake, we're in it now. If we sink we drown. If we swim, we soar.

WARDELL

What does that mean? Your whole "wise old man" act is messing with my head now.

CANADA

You ever had your ass whooped by a wise old man?

WELLES

Ten seconds!

WARDELL

Sorry, Canny. I shouldn't have said that. I don't know what I was thinking calling you wise.

Canada glares at Wardell, who, despite landing a sick burn, is too scared to actually look at Canada.

WELLES

In Campbell's we trust!

He points to Ollie, who presses a button that illuminates the ON AIR sign above the studio. We're live. It's happening.

OLLIE

The Columbia Broadcasting System and its affiliated stations present Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre on the Air in *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells.

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The Mercury Theatre theme swells. The tension in the room hangs heavy. Welles loosens his tie and takes a sip of water.

OLLIE

Ladies and gentlemen: the director of the Mercury Theatre and star of these broadcasts, Orson Welles.

Underscore Welles

SQ 85

LQ 13
SQ 90

WELLES

We know now that in the early years of the twentieth century this world was being watched closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own. We know now that as human beings busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency people went to and fro over the earth about their little affairs, serene in the assurance of their dominion over this small spinning fragment of solar driftwood which by chance or design man has inherited out of the dark mystery of Time and Space. Yet across an immense ethereal gulf, minds that are to our minds as ours are

to the beasts in the jungle, intellects vast, cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes and slowly and surely drew their plans against us. In the thirty-ninth year of the twentieth century came the great disillusionment. It was near the end of October. Business was better. The war scare was over. More men were back at work. Sales were picking up. On this particular evening, October 30th, the Crosley service estimated that thirty-two million people were listening in on radios.

SQ95 (out)

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

LQ 14

...for the next twenty-four hours not much change in temperature. A slight atmospheric disturbance of undetermined origin is reported over Nova Scotia, causing a low pressure area to move down rather rapidly over the northeastern states, bringing a forecast of rain, accompanied by winds of light gale force. Maximum temperature 66; minimum 48. This weather report comes to you from the Government Weather Bureau. We now take you to the Meri- (*Wardell stumbles.*) Meridian Room in the Hotel Park Plaza in downtown New York, where you will be entertained by the music of Ramón Raquello and his orchestra.

SQ120

Ollie throws on some music. The ON AIR light above the studio goes dark.

CANADA

(*Imitating Wardell*) "My cold read's fine."

WARDELL

Shut up, Canny.

27

WELLES

Wardell, *leave no rubs nor botches in the work.*

WARDELL

Sorry, sir.

CANADA

Hm. Maybe you are a little scared.

WARDELL

You...ah, you...should be scared. (*To himself.*) Damn it.

SQ 125

The light shifts to ON AIR.

ANNOUNCER (EDNA)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. From the Meridian Room in the Park Plaza in New York City, we bring you the music of Ramón Raquello and his orchestra. With a touch of the Spanish. Ramón Raquello leads off with "La Cumparsita."

SQ 130

We hear a bit more of the music. Welles begins a countdown from five with his fingers. Four...three...two...

SQ133

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt our program of dance music to bring you a special bulletin from the Intercontinental Radio News. At twenty minutes before eight, central time, Professor Farrell of the Mount Jennings Observatory, Chicago, Illinois, reports observing several explosions of incandescent gas, occurring at regular intervals on the planet Mars. The spectroscope indicates the gas to be hydrogen and moving towards the earth with enormous velocity. Professor Pierson of the Observatory at Princeton confirms Farrell's observation, and describes the phenomenon as (quote) like a jet of blue light shot from a gun (unquote). We now return you to the music of Ramón Raquello, playing for you in the Meridian Room of the Park Plaza Hotel, situated in downtown New York.

The actors applaud as if a band just finished playing.

SQ 135

ANNOUNCER (EDNA)

Now a tune that never loses favor, the ever-popular "Star Dust." Ramón Raquello and his orchestra . . .

SQ 140

28

Off air. Welles comes over to Ollie.

WELLES

Pianissimo, please.

OLLIE

Got it.

WELLES

Wardell, a little more urgency in the read.

WARDELL

Yes, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

Wardell, you familiar with the term “apple-polisher?”

WARDELL

No, sir. But my uncle used to work on an orchard down in—

WELLES

Wardell! *(He points to Wardell’s mic)*

SQ 145- fade out

The music fades down. Wardell jumps back into character.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, following on the news given in our bulletin a moment ago, the Government Meteorological Bureau has requested the large observatories of the country to keep an astronomical watch on any further disturbances occurring on the planet Mars. Due to the unusual nature of this occurrence, we have arranged an interview with noted astronomer, Professor Pierson, who will give us his views on the event. In a few moments we will take you to the Princeton Observatory at Princeton, New Jersey. We return you until then to the music of Ramón Raquello and his orchestra.

SQ 150- music

Off air. Wardell is sweating.

WARDELL

Sorry, Mr. Welles.

WELLES

29

Wardell, please remove your head from your ass and start acting like this is the most important night of your life.

WARDELL

Yes, sir.

Canada leans over to Wardell.

CANADA

Now you’re making me nervous. Breathe, son. You can do this.

Wardell takes a deep breath. They're back on the air.

SQ 155

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

We are now ready to take you to the Princeton Observatory at Princeton where Carl Phillips, our commentator, will interview Professor Richard Pierson, famous astronomer. We take you now to Princeton, New Jersey.

Ollie creates the sound of a science laboratory. Canada is a natural on mic.

SQ 160

PHILLIPS (CANADA)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Carl Phillips, speaking to you from the observatory at Princeton. I am standing in a large semi-circular room, pitch black except for an oblong split in the ceiling. Professor Pierson stands directly above me on a small platform, peering through a giant lens. . . Professor, may I begin our questions?

PIERSON (WELLES)

At any time, Mr. Phillips.

PHILLIPS

Professor, would you please tell our radio audience exactly what you see as you observe the planet Mars through your telescope?

PIERSON

Nothing unusual at the moment, Mr. Phillips. A red disk swimming in a blue sea. Transverse stripes across the disk. Quite distinct now because Mars happens to be the point nearest the earth . . . in opposition, as we call it.

PHILLIPS

In your opinion, what do these transverse stripes signify, Professor Pierson?

30

PIERSON

Not canals, I can assure you, Mr. Phillips, although that's the popular conjecture of those who imagine Mars to be inhabited. From a scientific viewpoint the stripes are merely the result of atmospheric conditions peculiar to the planet.

PHILLIPS

Then you're quite convinced as a scientist that living intelligence as we know it does not

exist on Mars?

PIERSON

I'd say the chances against it are a thousand to one.

PHILLIPS

And yet how do you account for those gas eruptions occurring on the surface of the planet at regular intervals?

PIERSON

Mr. Phillips, I cannot account for it.

PHILLIPS

By the way, Professor, for the benefit of our listeners, how far is Mars from earth?

PIERSON

Approximately forty million miles.

PHILLIPS

Well, that seems a safe enough distance.

Welles pretends to receive a piece of paper off-mic.

PIERSON

Thank you.

PHILLIPS

Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen, someone has just handed Professor Pierson a message...Professor, may I read this message to the listening audience?

PIERSON

Certainly, Mr. Phillips

31

PHILLIPS

Ladies and gentlemen, I shall read you a wire addressed to Professor Pierson from Dr. Gray of the National History Museum, New York. "9:15 P. M. eastern standard time. Seismograph registered shock of almost earthquake intensity occurring within a

radius of twenty miles of Princeton. Please investigate. Signed, Lloyd Gray, Chief of Astronomical Division". Professor Pierson, could this occurrence possibly have something to do with the disturbances observed on the planet Mars?

PIERSON

Hardly, Mr. Phillips. This is probably a meteorite of unusual size and its arrival at this particular time is merely a coincidence. However, we shall conduct a search, as soon as daylight permits.

PHILLIPS

Thank you, Professor. Ladies and gentlemen, this is Carl Phillips speaking. We are returning you now to our New York studio.

SQ 170- fade out

Off air. John enters.

JOHN

So...it's definitely working.

Welles takes John aside.

WELLES

What have you heard?

JOHN

John Barrymore called. He's livid. Said he heard the first mention of explosions on Mars and released his three labradors into the wild. Another call from some nut in Ohio—a guy swearing he saw strange lights in the sky.

WELLES

Incredible!

JOHN

Our police contact said a couple drunks got taken down to the station. They couldn't figure out if what they were hearing was real or fake so they just started hitting each other in the face.

WELLES

32

Any word from Ernie Pryce?

JOHN

None yet. But the night is young.

John nods and exits. Welles points to Wardell who delivers his next speech.

SQ 175

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, here is a special announcement from Trenton, New Jersey. It is reported that at 8:50 P. M. a huge, flaming object, believed to be a meteorite, fell on a farm in the neighborhood of Grovers Mill, New Jersey, twenty-two miles from Trenton. The flash in the sky was visible within a radius of several hundred miles and the noise of the impact was heard as far north as Elizabeth. We have dispatched a special mobile unit to the scene, and will have our commentator, Carl Phillips, give you a word picture of the scene as soon as he can reach there from Princeton. In the meantime, we take you to the Hotel Martinet in Brooklyn, where Bobby Millette and his orchestra are offering a program of dance music.

Off air. Welles speaks with Ollie.

SQ180

CANADA

Gotta say, you're doing alright.

WARDELL

I, uh, I'm not sure if you're joking or not.

CANADA

I'm not. I wish I was, but I'm not.

WARDELL

Well then, thank you, Canny.

CANADA

Keep it up, kid. This night could end up pretty good for you. *(He looks toward Welles.)* I'd just be sure to stay on his good side.

WARDELL

Yeah?

CANADA

I know you haven't been with us long, but you've probably already noticed: he can be a real son of a bitch. I've seen this man go ballistic because an intern put ice in his water.

WARDELL

Lois?

LQ 14.5 telephone!!!!

CANADA

No. Most assuredly not Lois.

A light on the phone in the studio goes off. Edna notices and lets Welles know.

LQ 14.6

EDNA

Orson, telephone

He rolls his eyes and answers it.

WELLES

Yes?! *(A pause. He softens.)* Lois, hello...

Canada clocks this.

CANADA

(To Edna.) How long do you give that?

EDNA

What?

Canada nods to Welles, still on the phone with Lois.

LQ 16 (Enter lobby)

ENDA

(In disbelief.) Nooooo.

CANADA

It's pretty obvious.

EDNA

Poor thing.

CANADA

Maybe she'll make it out ok?

34

EDNA
They never do.

WARDELL
What are you two talking about?

CANADAAND EDNA
Nothing.

Welles walks over to the windows and looks down.

WELLES
That was Lois with an update. Twenty-two car crashes in the county alone. Richard over at the Hilton on 8th Ave said a few farmers downstate have called to make reservations.

LQ 17 (move back to studio)

CANADA
Oooh...this is great.

WELLES
It's only gonna get better, friends. Keep it up. Also, Wardell: Lois said your girlfriend called to check in.

WARDELL
Josephine?

WELLES
Did you tell her you were working tonight?

WARDELL
Yes.

WELLES
She called the studio. Lois said she's hysterical.

WARDELL

Yes, she's a real riot! Love her!

WELLES

No, I mean she was in hysterics.

35

WARDELL

Haha, yeah! *(It sinks in.)* Wait...do...do you mean, the bad kind of hysterical?

WELLES

Here we go, Ollie.

On air. The song finishes. The actors applaud.

SQ 185

OLLIE

How about one more from the boys? Enjoy this encore of "Downtown Suite" by Bobby Millette and his Orchestra.

SQ 190

Off air. More music. Welles approaches Ollie. Wardell considers interrupting when Edna stops him.

EDNA

How's this sound for this Wilmuth lady. *(In an exaggerated southern accent:)*
"Knocked me clear outta my chair!"

CANADA

Is she southern? I thought we're in New Jersey.

EDNA

Oh hell, you're right.

WARDELL

Edna, what do I do?

EDNA

About what?

WARDELL

Josephine.

EDNA
She's fine.

WARDELL
Mr. Welles said she was hysterical.

36

EDNA
But you told her you were working tonight, right?

WARDELL
Yes, but that was before Mr. Welles took a chainsaw to the script. She wasn't expecting this.

CANADA
What are you gonna do? Send a carrier pigeon?

WARDELL
Canny, you're not helping. Josephine has trouble with... I mean she's...

EDNA
We'll have a station break at some point. If she hears that, she won't have anything to worry about.

WARDELL
But until then—

Welles violently waves his hand to cue a highly distracted Wardell.

WELLES
Wardell!

SQ 195

Wardell recovers. On air.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)
We take you now to Grovers Mill, New Jersey.

SQ200

Ollie creates a farm soundscape. Moos and clucks. The rest of the cast creates crowd

murmurs.

PHILLIPS (CANADA)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Carl Phillips again, at the Wilmuth farm, Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Well, I... I hardly know where to begin...I guess that's it. Yes, I guess that's the...thing, directly in front of me, half buried in a vast pit. Must have struck with terrific force. The ground is covered with splinters of a tree it must have struck on its way down. What I can see of the... object itself doesn't look very much like a meteor, at least not the meteors I've seen. It looks more like a huge cylinder. It has a diameter of...what would you say, Professor Pierson?

37

PIERSON (WELLES)

What's that?

PHILLIPS

What would you say...what is the diameter?

PIERSON

About thirty yards.

PHILLIPS

About thirty yards...The metal on the sheath is...well, I've never seen anything like it. The color is sort of yellowish-white. Curious spectators now are pressing close to the object in spite of the efforts of the police to keep them back. They're getting in front of my line of vision. Would you mind standing to one side, please?

POLICEMAN (OLLIE)

One side, there, one side.

PHILLIPS

While the policemen are pushing the crowd back, here's Mrs. Wilmuth, owner of the farm here. She may have some interesting facts to add...Mrs. Wilmuth, would you please tell the radio audience as much as you remember of this rather unusual visitor that dropped in your backyard?

WILMUTH (EDNA)

Well, I was listenin' to the radio.

PHILLIPS

Closer and louder please.

WILMUTH

Pardon me!

PHILLIPS

Louder, please, and closer.

WILMUTH

Yes, sir -- while I was listening to the radio and kinda drowsin', that Professor fellow was talkin' about Mars, so I was half dozin' and half...

38

PHILLIPS

Yes, yes, Mrs. Wilmuth. Then what happened?

WILMUTH

As I was sayin', I was listenin' to the radio kinda halfways...

PHILLIPS

Yes, Mrs. Wilmuth, and then you saw something?

WILMUTH

Not first off. I heard something.

PHILLIPS

And what did you hear?

WILMUTH

A hissing sound. Like this: ssssss...kinda like a Fourth of July rocket.

PHILLIPS

Then what?

WILMUTH

Turned my head out the window and would have swore I was to sleep and dreamin.'

PHILLIPS

Yes?

WILMUTH

I seen a kinda greenish streak and then zingo! Somethin' smacked the ground. Knocked me clear out of my chair!

PHILLIPS

Well, were you frightened, Mrs. Wilmuth?

WILMUTH

Well, I—I ain't quite sure. I reckon I—I was kinda riled.

PHILLIPS

Thank you, Mrs. Wilmuth. Thank you.

39

WILMUTH

Want me to tell you some more?

PHILLIPS

No...That's quite all right, that's plenty. Now, ladies and gentlemen, there's something I haven't mentioned in all this excitement, but now it's becoming more distinct. Perhaps you've caught it already on your radio. Listen:

Ollie creates an eerie scraping sound with a jar.

LQ 17.4

PHILLIPS

Do you hear it? It's a curious scraping sound that seems to come from inside the object. I'll move the microphone nearer. *(Pause.)* Now we're not more than twenty-five feet away. Can you hear it now? Oh, Professor Pierson!

PIERSON

Yes, Mr. Phillips?

PHILLIPS

Can you tell us the meaning of that scraping noise inside the thing?

PIERSON

Possibly the unequal cooling of its surface.

PHILLIPS

I see, do you still think it's a meteor, Professor?

PIERSON

I don't know what to think. The metal casing is definitely extraterrestrial...not found on this earth. Friction with the earth's atmosphere usually tears holes in a meteorite. This thing is smooth and, as you can see, of cylindrical shape.

PHILLIPS

Just a minute! Something's happening! Ladies and gentlemen, this is terrific! This end of the thing is beginning to flake off! The top is beginning to rotate like a screw! The thing must be hollow!

VOICES (ALL)

40

She's movin'! Look, the darn thing's unscrewing! Keep back, there! Keep back, I tell you! Maybe there's men in it trying to escape! It's red hot, they'll burn to a cinder! Keep back there. **Keep those idiots back!**

SQ 215

Ollie creates the sound of a huge piece of falling metal.

VOICES

She's off! The top's loose! Look out there! Stand back!

PHILLIPS

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the most terrifying thing I have ever witnessed... Wait a minute! Someone's crawling out of the hollow top. Someone or...something. I can see peering out of that black hole two luminous disks...are they eyes? It might be a face. It might be...

The actors create genuinely terrifying screams and shouts. Wardell stands back and looks on, terrified.

PHILLIPS

Good heavens, something's wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now it's another one, and another. They look like tentacles to me. There, I can see the thing's body. It's large, large as a bear and it glistens like wet leather. But that face, it...Ladies and gentlemen, it's indescribable. I

can hardly force myself to keep looking at it. The eyes are black and gleam like a serpent. The mouth is V-shaped with saliva dripping from its rimless lips that seem to quiver and pulsate. The monster or whatever it is can hardly move. It seems weighed down by...possibly gravity or something. The thing's raising up. The crowd falls back now. They've seen plenty. This is the most extraordinary experience. I can't find words...I'll pull this microphone with me as I talk. I'll have to stop the description until I can take a new position. Hold on, will you please, I'll be right back in a minute.

LQ 17.5
SQ 225

All sound quickly shuts off and the ON AIR sign goes dark. Canada checks in on Wardell. Welles checks in with Ollie.

CANADA

What's the matter with you?

WARDELL

This is wrong.

CANADA

How do you mean?

41

WARDELL

I mean we shouldn't be doing this.

EDNA

Just breathe. Have some water.

WARDELL

But...Josephine. She's scared. She could've been in one of those car crashes on her way to the studio to check on me. She had no idea what she was tuning into tonight. At best, she thinks I'm a liar, at worst...

EDNA

There is no "at worst." At worst, she's having a series of stiff drinks and will be asleep on the couch in her nightgown by the time you get home. Just leave it be.

John enters carrying a notepad, which he reads from.

JOHN

Fifty-seven car crashes in the county. None fatal. A teenager in critical condition after driving into a telephone pole. The switchboards are going haywire. People fleeing their homes, saying they've seeing lights in the sky and odd cylinders buried in the ground.

Welles starts laughing uncontrollably.

JOHN
Orson.

WELLES
Did I call it, or did I call it?! What's next? People swearing that a stop sign is an invader from Jupiter? Just incredible. We heard from Ernie Pryce?

JOHN
Not yet. But his silence is deafening. I wonder if he'd still want to sponsor us if this escalates.

WELLES
Are you kidding? He'll love it. If the audience believes martians could invade the planet then they'll believe Campbell's is the best soup on the shelves.

WARDELL

42

John, any calls from a woman named Josephine? Is

JOHN
Who?

WELLES
Don't listen to him.

WARDELL
My fiance. Well, girlfriend. Fiance-to-be. She called earlier and—

Welles pushes John toward the door.

WELLES
Thank you, John. Keep us updated.

John leaves. Welles turns and gives Wardell a wide-eyed smile.

WELLES

You're up, slugger.

CANADA

(To Edna.) There's daggers in men's smiles.

Welles counts down from three with his fingers, then points to Wardell.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

We now return you to Carl Phillips at Grovers Mill.

LQ 17.6

PHILLIPS (CANADA)

Ladies and gentlemen—am I on?. Ladies and gentlemen, here I am, back of a stone wall that adjoins Mrs. Wilmuth's garden. From here I get a sweep of the whole scene. I'll give you every detail as long as I can talk. As long as I can see. More state police have arrived. The captain is conferring with someone. We can't quite see who. Oh yes, I believe it's Professor Pierson. The Professor moves around one side, studying the object, while the captain and two policemen advance with something in their hands. I can see it now. It's a white handkerchief tied to a pole...a flag of truce. If those creatures know what that means...what anything means! Wait! **Something's happening!**

SQ 230

Ollie creates a loud hissing sound.

43

PHILLIPS

A humped shape is rising out of the pit. I can make out a small beam of light against a mirror. What's that? There's a jet of flame springing from the mirror, and it leaps right at the advancing men. It strikes them head on! Good Lord, they're turning into flame!

Ollie, Welles and Edna shriek. Wardell half-asses it.

PHILLIPS

Now the whole field's caught fire. *(An explosion from Ollie.)* The woods...the barns...the gas tanks of automobiles...it's spreading everywhere. It's coming this way. About twenty yards to my right...

SQ 235

Another cut to abrupt silence. Welles holds up his hands, freezing the actors in place. After a few moments, he points to Wardell.

SQ 240

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control, we are unable to continue the broadcast from Grovers Mill. Evidently there's some difficulty with our field transmission. However, we will return to that point at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, we have a late bulletin from San Diego, California. Professor Indellkoffer, speaking at a dinner of the California Astronomical Society, expressed the opinion that the explosions on Mars are *(He gets closer to the mic.)* undoubtedly nothing more than severe volcanic disturbances on the surface of the planet. We'll be right back with more coverage of this situation after a word from our sponsors.

Nathan Jerkins returns. House lights rise. The actors all look very concerned and embarrassed.

NATHAN

Pause! Very sorry. Just...pretend like I'm not even here.

LQ 17.7 (house lights)

Nathan distributes a few pieces of paper to the actors, taking their old sheets from them. Marc tries to intervene.

MARC

Nathan...

NATHAN

Y'all are doing so great. Keep it up. Just...

MARC

44

Nathan...

NATHAN

Marc. *(He points to Kenah.)* Just...uh, read the thing! *(To the stage manager:)* Unpause!

Nathan leaves. The show resumes. Kenah, in character as Wardell, reads an ad for the show's sponsor. The other actors are clearly not pleased at this.

WARDELL

During these hot summers, it can feel like Central Texas is under attack from heat ray-wielding martians. No one wants to do battle with rising temperatures, so make sure your home comfort is assured with Hindley Heating and Cooling. And this just came in over the wire: on top of our 15% discount on all services, we're adding in free junk removal. That's right, we'll haul away any junk you've got lying around that fits in the passenger side area of a standard fleet van. Just dial the operator and use promo code: HEATRAY for 15% off all services plus junk removal. That's HEATRAY, for 15% off, plus goodbye junk!

*The **APPLAUSE** sign illuminates. Kenah gets us back on track.*

LQ 17.8 (applause sign)

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

(Improvising.) **And now, back to our broadcast.** *(He continues.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been handed a message that came in from Grovers Mill by telephone. Just a moment. At least forty people, including six state troopers lie dead in a field east of the village of Grovers Mill, their bodies burned and distorted beyond all possible recognition. The next voice you hear will be that of Brigadier General Montgomery Smith, commander of the state militia at Trenton, New Jersey.

**17.9- house lights out
LQ 18**

SMITH (CANADA)

I have been requested by the governor of New Jersey to place the counties of Mercer and Middlesex as far west as Princeton, and east to Jamesburg, under martial law. No one will be permitted to enter this area except by special pass issued by state or military authorities. Four companies of state militia are proceeding from Trenton to Grovers Mill, and will aid in the evacuation of homes within the range of military operations. Thank you.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, I have just been informed that we have finally established communication with an eyewitness of the tragedy. Professor Pierson has been located at a farmhouse near Grovers Mill where he has established an emergency observation post. As a scientist, he will give you his explanation of the calamity. The next voice you hear will be that of Professor Pierson, brought to you by direct wire. Professor Pierson.

45

Welles grabs a tin can from Ollie, which he speaks through.

PIERSON (WELLES)

Of the creatures in the rocket cylinder at Grovers Mill, I can give you no authoritative information—either as to their nature, their origin, or their purposes here on earth. Of their destructive instrument I might venture some conjectural explanation. For want of a better term, I shall refer to the mysterious weapon as a heat ray. It's all too evident that these creatures have scientific knowledge far in advance of our own. It is my guess that in some way they are able to generate an intense heat in a chamber of practically absolute nonconductivity. This intense heat they project in a parallel beam against any object they choose, by means of a polished parabolic mirror of unknown composition, much as the mirror of a lighthouse projects a beam of light. That is my conjecture of the origin of the heat ray.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Thank you, Professor Pierson. Ladies and gentlemen, here is a bulletin from Trenton. It is a brief statement informing us that the charred body of Carl Phillips has been identified in a Trenton hospital. Now here's another bulletin from Washington, D.C.

Lois enters the lobby and crosses to the studio door. She opens it very delicately and beckons Welles. He looks to his troupe and nods toward Ollie to take over the reins while he handles this. Welles exits to the lobby with Lois as the broadcast continues faintly on the other side of the door.

LQ 19

Suddenly, they kiss. It is long and passionate. When they break away, Lois is all smiles.

LOIS

Is this the face that launched a thousand tripods?

WELLES

I don't have long.

LOIS

Neither do I. Those envelopes aren't going to lick themselves.

WELLES

How do I sound?

LOIS

Perfect.

Welles kisses her cheek.

LOIS

Is that why you didn't answer when I called?

WELLES

Last night?

LOIS

Last night, this morning...

WELLES

This was an all-hours job, sweet. I wasn't taking any calls. Damn near went deaf from pounding the typewriter so hard.

LOIS

Should I be jealous of your typewriter?

Welles smiles. He's got one ear on Lois, one on the broadcast.

WELLES

Will that be all, Ms. Ballard?

LOIS

(Pointing to the studio.) What role am I playing?

WELLES

I have to go.

LOIS

No you don't.

WELLES

I really do.

LOIS

Did you forget?

WELLES

47

Lois...

LOIS

He's up all night and he forgets to write in a role for his girlfriend?

WELLES

Is that what this is?

LOIS

Is that what what is?

Welles gives a hard listen to his broadcast.

WELLES

Not this time, sweet. I'm...I'm doing something here. Something...specific. You have to understand. Next time, I tell the suits you're Medea. Next time, you're Desdemona. You're—

LOIS

Lady Macbeth?

Welles swallows. It stings.

WELLES

You really shouldn't say that name here...

LOIS

It could've been me.

WELLES

It couldn't have.

LOIS

There are ways.

WELLES

Not the right ways.

LOIS

Orson. I don't like games.

48

WELLES

There's no game, sweet. I promise. Chin up. Look at me.

She does. He is irresistible.

WELLES

This is the face that will launch Lois Ballard's career.

He kisses her and holds her close. John enters the lobby and sees them. They break away, Lois with more urgency than Welles. Lois walks past John and exits.

JOHN

The night has been unruly.

WELLES

Stands Scotland where it did?

JOHN

We've got reports from the hospital: fainting, hyperventilation, panic attacks, nausea. The police station's got numbers on the arrests and it's nearly a dozen. A guy brandishing a shotgun in the street, aiming it at lights the sky—sense a pattern? Apparently some people are breaking into their neighbor's homes to steal supplies.

WELLES

John, this feels like Christmas!

JOHN

Orson, I think you oughta say something.

WELLES

What do you mean?

Back in the studio, Ollie puts on some music and the sign above the studio switches to OFF AIR.

SQ 265

JOHN

There. We're on a station break. Make an announcement. Tell them it's a dramatization. We've had our fun. Now it's time to pull off the sheet.

WELLES

Absolutely not, John! No breaks. We're pushing through.

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JOHN

Orson, I think it's the wisest choice. Campbell's would think it responsible of us.

WELLES

John, where's your spine?! We are not stopping! For any reason!

JOHN

Orson...

John places a hand on Welles' shoulder and pulls him in. He looks back at the door to the lobby where Lois exited.

JOHN

Not her, Orson. I've said it before, and I'll say it now: that's not a wise move. We both know that.

LQ 20 marc move to studio(studio and lobby)

Welles shrugs away John's hand and storms back into the studio. John follows.

LQ 20.5 when move into studio fully

WELLES

You're a coward, John! And really, you should be grateful. All of you should be grateful. A year from now when you're all auditioning at MGM, you'll be seeing my face at night shining down on you when you count your blessings. Nine P.M. tonight, we're all gods, if we all just shut our goddamn mouths and read the goddamn script. But if any of you fouls this up, I'll be sure to make it hurt so bad for you.

JOHN

Orson, if you heard the things I heard...

WELLES

John—

JOHN

I would advise you to—

WELLES

John, piss off to your little hidey hole. I've had enough of your unsolicited advice for one night. *John breathes, shakes his head.*

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JOHN

Fine. I'll go. I'll just send down Lois with any updates.

John crosses to the door, but before he leaves...

JOHN

Maybe you're nicer to the people you're screwing.

Welles lunges at John, but Canada and Wardell hold him back.

WELLES

I'll have your head, John! You'll be sorry you ever doubted me!

JOHN

(To Edna.) Make sure he has some water. He's not himself.

WELLES

I'm on the verge of changing history. I've never felt more myself.

John leaves. Edna brings Welles a glass of water.

LQ 20.6 (john exits)

EDNA

Are you gonna throw this? If you're gonna throw this, just know that I cannot get my hair wet. *Welles takes a sip and nods to Edna, who returns to her station.*

WELLES

Wardell?

On Air: Wardell dives back into the waters.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a grave announcement to make. Incredible as it may seem, both the observations of science and the evidence of our eyes lead to the inescapable assumption that those strange beings who landed in the Jersey farmlands tonight are the vanguard of an invading army from the planet Mars. The battle which took place tonight at Grovers Mill has ended in one of the most startling defeats ever suffered by any army in modern times; seven thousand men armed with rifles and machine guns pitted against a single fighting machine of the invaders from Mars. One hundred and twenty known survivors. We take you now to Washington for a special broadcast on the National Emergency. The Secretary of the Interior...

LQ 21

51

Welles performs this role, with a pitch-perfect impression of FDR.

SECRETARY (WELLES)

Citizens of the nation: I shall not try to conceal the gravity of the situation that confronts the country, nor the concern of your government in protecting the lives and property of its people. However, I wish to impress upon you—private citizens and public officials, all of you—the urgent need of calm and resourceful action. Fortunately, this formidable enemy is still confined to a comparatively small area, and we may place our faith in the military forces to keep them there. In the meantime placing our faith in God we must continue the performance of our duties each and every one of us, so that we may confront this destructive adversary with a nation united, courageous, and consecrated to the preservation of human supremacy on this earth. I thank you.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

You have just heard the secretary of the Interior speaking from Washington. Bulletins too numerous to read are piling up in the studio here.

Lois enters the studio, holding a bundle of cue cards. She shows each one as Wardell continues his speech.

ANNOUNCER (WARDELL)

We are informed the central portion of New Jersey is blacked out from radio communication due to the effect of the heat ray upon power lines and electrical

equipment. *[CARD: John sent me.]* Here is a special bulletin from New York. Cables received from English, French, German scientific bodies offering assistance. *[CARD: People showing up outside studio seeking refuge.]* Astronomers report continued gas outbursts at regular intervals on planet Mars. *[CARD: About 20.]* Majority voice opinion that enemy will be reinforced by additional rocket machines. *[CARD: Getting violent.]* Attempts made to locate Professor Pierson of Princeton, who has observed Martians at close range. It is feared he was lost in recent battle. *[CARD: Say they've seen martians. Some with burns.]* Langham Field, Virginia: Scouting planes report three Martian machines visible above treetops, moving north towards Somerville with population fleeing ahead of them. *[CARD: Josephine here.] (Wardell pauses briefly, but Welles urges him to continue.)* Heat ray not in use; although advancing at express-train speed, invaders pick their way carefully. They seem to be making conscious effort to avoid destruction of cities and countryside. However, they stop to uproot power lines, bridges, and railroad tracks. Their apparent objective is to crush resistance, paralyze communication, and disorganize human society. *[CARD: Very scared.] (Wardell is clearly panicking while trying to keep it together enough to continue reading.)* Here is a bulletin from Basking Ridge, New Jersey: Coon hunters have stumbled on a second cylinder similar to the first embedded in the great swamp twenty miles south of

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Morristown. *[CARD: Unsure what to do about crowd.]* Army fieldpieces are proceeding from Newark to blow up second invading unit before cylinder can be opened and the fighting machine rigged. *(Welles grabs one of Lois' cards and writes on it.)* They are taking up position in the foothills of Watchung Mountains. Another bulletin from Langham Field, Virginia: Scouting planes report enemy machines, now three in number, increasing speed northward kicking over houses and trees in their evident haste to form a conjunction with their allies south of Morristown. *[WELLES' CARD: Build wall.]* Machines also sighted by telephone operator east of Middlesex within ten miles of Plainfield. Ladies and gentlemen, we've run special wires to the artillery line in adjacent villages to give you direct reports in the zone of the advancing enemy. First we take you to the battery of the 22nd Field Artillery, located in the Watchung Mountains.

Off air. Lois exits. Wardell leaves his post.

WARDELL

I'm going down there. Canny, take over for me.

WELLES

Who the hell put you in charge?

WARDELL

She's here.

WELLES
Wardell...

WARDELL
I have to make sure she's ok, Mr. Welles. Lois said there were people with burns—

WELLES
Take one more step and I'll dropkick your ass to Central Park.

WARDELL
Sir—

WELLES
Get on that mic.

Wardell seethes. He looks away from Welles like a scolded pet. He takes a breath. Then: WARDELL

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No.

WELLES
What did you say to me?

WARDELL
No.

Welles' jaw tightens. His fists are like bricks by his sides. Wardell is terrified, but steadfast.

WELLES
You lost your mind, son?

WARDELL
Maybe I have. Maybe I'm making a huge mistake. But I will not abandon my girl for you, or anybody else. This has gone on long enough, and I'm drawing the line.

WELLES

I'm shooting straight to the top tonight, and I'm bringing everyone with me but you.

WARDELL

And just like the rest of the people at the top, you'll have bullied your way there.

Coward. Welles lunges at Wardell, but Canada steps in the middle of them.

WELLES

If I ever see you again...

WARDELL

If you ever see me again, this won't be the man you see. And that's a promise.

Wardell exits. Welles turns to what's left of his ensemble, hot with rage. Suddenly, he smacks Wardell's music stand down, scattering the pages of his script.

WELLES

Anyone else wanna be a hero?!

*No one responds. They just look down at their scripts. Welles moves to his station and cues Ollie, who creates a battlefield soundscape. **On air.***

SQ 280

54

OFFICER (CANADA)

Range, thirty-two meters.

GUNNER (OLLIE)

Thirty-two meters.

OFFICER

Projection, thirty-nine degrees.

GUNNER

Thirty-nine degrees.

OFFICER

Fire!

SQ 285

Ollie creates a loud boom.

OBSERVER (EDNA)

One hundred and forty yards to the right, sir.

Lois enters the lobby and walks to the studio door, her hand on the knob. She listens in for a good time to open the door.

OFFICER

Shift range . . . thirty-one meters.

GUNNER

Thirty-one meters

OFFICER

Projection . . . thirty-seven degrees.

GUNNER

Thirty-seven degrees.

OFFICER

Fire!

SQ 290

Another boom. Lois cracks opens the door. Welles sees her and scowls with confusion. He quietly approaches her, nodding to Ollie to cover things.

55

OBSERVER

A hit, sir! We got the tripod of one of them. They've stopped. The others are trying to repair it.

LQ 22

Welles exits and closes the door behind him. The broadcast continues underneath Lois and Welles' conversation.

WELLES

I have thirty seconds.

LOIS

Did Wardell just leave?

WELLES

Don't worry about him.

LOIS

He's not coming back?

WELLES

You make it sound as if I'd let that idiot back in my studio.

LOIS

Well...this changes things.

WELLES

We can cover it. Remember when Canada got food poisoning in the middle of A Christmas Carol?

LOIS

Orson. You need to let me in.

WELLES

Lois...

LOIS

I want in.

WELLES

Sweet...

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LOIS

Orson...this is monumental. I can see it. Something is clearly...happening. And I want in.

WELLES

Not this one.

LOIS

No, this one. Right now. It's time. I have to be a part of this.

WELLES

Lois...

LOIS

Tell Edna to take five. Let me fill in for a page. Just a goddamn page, Orson!

WELLES

No!

SQ 300

A boom from Ollie inside the studio. Lois is stunned.

LOIS

Orson...

WELLES

I have to go.

LOIS

Please...

WELLES

I have to—

LOIS

What am I to you? Just some taste? Your peek over the fence?

WELLES

Excuse me?

LOIS

57

Don't think I haven't thought about what this means. What we mean.

WELLES

Lois, this isn't the time.

LOIS

Then when? Before or after I go to the tabloids?

Another boom from Ollie. Welles takes a deep breath.

WELLES

You wouldn't.

Lois takes a step back. It's silent. It's tense. Eventually, she takes his hand.

LOIS

You're right. I...I don't know what I was thinking.

WELLES

No you don't, Lois. You most certainly do not know what you were thinking. It sounds to me like you just hurled a threat at your only chance at anything resembling a career in showbusiness. Because you sure as hell can't put pencil-sharpening and coffee-fetching on an acting resume.

LOIS

You're right, Orson. I'm sorry.

WELLES

And don't lecture me about what we mean. We're playing kickball in a minefield. But, make no mistake, only one of us is gonna explode if the wind blows wrong.

LOIS

Yes, Orson.

WELLES

I hope I've made myself clear.

LOIS

You have.

WELLES

58

Now run along. If it's the end of the world, certainly your skills would be much more useful elsewhere.

LOIS

Of course.

Welles watches her exit. He takes a breath, and prepares to re-enter the studio. But before he does...

NATHAN
(*Offstage.*) Ahem.

Welles crosses delicately to the wings where Nathan's outstretched hand, holding a piece of notebook paper, awaits.

Marc tries to continue acting, as if he hadn't heard Nathan clear his throat, as if he hadn't made that cross. But then Nathan enters the space, the notebook paper extended toward his actor.

On the other side of the studio door, the other actors are uneasy, clearly waiting for their comrade to make his entrance. Nathan is unrelenting, though, and Marc grows even more unsure, even looking out to the audience for relief.

Finally, he takes the paper, and unfolds it. He reads what's written.

NATHAN
Should only take twenty seconds. Whenever feels natural.

MARC
Nathan...

But he's gone. Trying to keep the show alive, Marc pushes through and puts the paper in his pocket. He moves with urgency back to the studio where the show has continued in his absence. Ollie creates the sound of a chaotic cityscape.

ANNOUNCER (CANADA)

I'm speaking from the roof of the Broadcasting Building, New York City. The bells you hear are ringing to warn the people to evacuate the city as the Martians approach. Estimated in last two hours three million people have moved out along the roads to the north, Hutchinson River Parkway still kept open for motor traffic. Avoid bridges to Long Island... hopelessly jammed. All communication with Jersey shore closed ten minutes ago. No more defenses. Our army wiped

LQ 23 (Marc goes back to the studio)

LQ 23.3 NAtan Enter

LQ 23.4 NAtan exit

SQ 310

out...artillery, air force, everything wiped out. This may be the last broadcast. We'll stay here to the end...People are holding service below us in the cathedral.

The other actors begin singing a hymn. Maybe "Lift Every Voice."

ANNOUNCER

Wait a minute! Enemy now in sight above the Palisades. Five—five great machines. First one is crossing river. I can see it from here, wading the Hudson like a man wading through a brook... Now the first machine reaches the shore. He stands watching, looking over the city. His steel, cowlish head is even with the skyscrapers. He waits for the others. They rise like a line of new towers on the city's west side...Now they're lifting their metal hands. This is the end now. Smoke comes out...black smoke, drifting over the city. People in the streets see it now. They're running towards the East River...thousands of them, dropping in like rats. Now the smoke's spreading faster. It's reached Times Square. People trying to run away from it, but it's no use. They're falling like flies. Now the smoke's crossing Sixth Avenue...Fifth Avenue...one hundred yards away...it's fifty feet...

The sound of a body falling from fainting. The city sounds fade out.

OPERATOR FOUR (EDNA)

2X2L calling CQ . . . 2X2L calling CQ . . . 2X2L calling CQ . . . New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone . . .

SQ 325

Off air: A moment passes. Marc reaches into his breast pocket, seeing a moment to read the ad he was given...

He takes out the note, and the rest of the cast knows what's happening. They feel this. They breathe.

Then, Marc rips up the notebook paper and tosses it in a wastebin onstage.

The actors recover, relieved. Marc, now back in character, walks to the windows downstage and looks down.

WELLES

Nearly there, friends. Nearly there.

John comes in.

JOHN

60

Orson, it's bad. It's very bad. Looting and rioting in the streets. Hospitals filling up with burn victims. Heart attacks, Orson. People trying to take their own lives. Missing persons. People swearing that it was the martians that did it all. I...I don't know what to tell you, but something's not right. We well overshoot this thing, Orson.

Welles takes the news like a general in battle.

WELLES

Things without all remedy should be without regard.

JOHN

They're fighting to get in the studio building. The crowd down there...unbelievable. A mob. An angry mob. People trampled in the lobby, looting the gift shop.

WELLES

Some say the earth was feverous and did shake.

JOHN

The president is about to declare a state of emergency. Harlem is all but lost.

WELLES

Confusion now has made his masterpiece.

JOHN

I saw Wardell on his way out. He's just a kid, Orson. Is this the way you want this to go? Listen. I know better than to stand in your way when your genius is coming down the tracks. So I'll just step aside. But there's about to be no more track left. And it's a long, long way down.

SQ 330

John heads to the door, but stops to observe the can of Campbell's Soup, which has been presiding over the proceedings like a specter.

JOHN

I never cared much for Campbell's soup. Too much grit.

SQ 335

He exits, leaving the door open. We hear, faintly, the muffled sounds of chaos coming

from elsewhere in the building. Welles strides over to it and looks out. Then, he looks up at the can of Campbell's Soup and studies it. After a few moments, he slams the door shut, halting all sound, and beelines for his mic.

WELLES

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Ollie!

Ollie flips a switch. On air. Welles speaks over complete silence.

PIERSON (WELLES)

As I set down these notes on paper, I'm obsessed by the thought that I may be the last living man on earth. I'm hiding in this empty house near Grovers Mill—a small island of daylight cut off by the black smoke from the rest of the world. All that happened before the arrival of these monstrous creatures now seems part of another life... a life that has no continuity with the present, furtive existence of the lonely derelict who pencils these words on the back of some astronomical notes bearing the signature of Richard Pierson. I look down at my blackened hands, my torn shoes, my tattered clothes, and I try to connect them with a professor who lives at Princeton, and who on this night, October 30, glimpsed through his telescope an orange splash of light on a distant planet.

LQ 23.5
SQ 340

Lois enters the studio lobby, followed by Officer Wrigley. She speaks a few words to him in private as she motions to the door.

PIERSON

My wife, my colleagues, my students, my books, my observatory, my...my world...where are they? Did they ever exist? Am I Richard Pierson? Presently, with an odd feeling of being watched, I caught sight of something crouching in a doorway. I made a step towards it, and it rose up and became—

The door to the studio flings open, and Officer Wrigley enters. Lois remains in the lobby.

WRIGLEY

Stop.

LQ 24 (wriggly enter)

Wrigley takes a few steps into the space, surveying the proceedings. Welles now sees Lois, a world away on the far end of the lobby. After a few moments, she exits.

WRIGLEY

(Shaking his head, to Welles.) Where did you come from?

Welles doesn't stop the show. He improvises, delicately guiding the "scene" along in character. He knows it could all topple right here.

PIERSON

I come from...many places. A long time ago from Princeton.

62

WRIGLEY

Princeton, huh? That's near Grovers Mill, isn't it?

PIERSON

Yes.

WRIGLEY

Grovers Mill...*(He crosses to the windows.)* This is my country... **Or at least it was,**

Thump on booth

before— *Suddenly, a loud bang on the windows.*

WRIGLEY

Jesus!

He instinctively puts his hand on his gun. He holds it there for a moment, then relaxes.

PIERSON

Only a bird...

Wrigley continues pacing around the room.

WRIGLEY

They wrecked the greatest country in the world. They've only lost one machine. One. There isn't anything to do. We're done. We're licked. I should know. I was in the militia before this. National guard.

PIERSON

What do you think they'll do with us?

WRIGLEY

I've thought it all out. Right now we're caught as we're wanted. The Martian only has to go a few miles to get a crowd on the run. But they won't keep doing that. They'll begin catching us systematic-like—keeping the best and storing us in cages and things. They haven't begun on us yet!

PIERSON

Not begun!

WRIGLEY

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Not begun!

PIERSON

But if that's so, what is there to live for?

WRIGLEY

Life itself! I want to live. I'm not going to be exterminated. And I don't mean to be caught, either, and tamed, and fattened, and bred, like an ox.

PIERSON

What are you going to do?

WRIGLEY

I'm going on...right under their feet. I got a plan. We men as men are finished. We don't know enough. From my post I see all these little office workers—they're no good. They haven't any stuff to 'em. I've seen hundreds of 'em, running wild to catch their commuter train in the morning for fear they'd get canned if they didn't. And the have-nots among us—you know what I mean—the Martians will be a godsend for them. Nice roomy cages, good food, careful breeding, no worries. After a week or so chasing about the fields on empty stomachs they'll come and be glad to be caught.

PIERSON

You've thought it all out, haven't you?

WRIGLEY

You bet I have! And that isn't all. These Martians will make pets of some of 'em, train 'em to do tricks. Who knows? Get sentimental over the pet boy who grew up and had

to be killed...And some, maybe, they'll train to hunt us.

PIERSON

No, that's impossible. No human being—

WRIGLEY

Yes they will. There's men who'll do it gladly. If one of them ever comes after me, why...

PIERSON

In the meantime, where are we to live when the Martians own the earth?

WRIGLEY

64

I've got it all figured out. I'll live underground. I've been thinking about the sewers. Under New York are miles and miles of 'em. The main ones are big enough for anybody. Then there's cellars, vaults, underground storerooms, railway tunnels, subways. I'll raid the museums, I'll even spy on the Martians. It may not be so much I have to learn before—just imagine this: four or five of their own fighting machines suddenly start off...heat rays right and left and not a Martian in 'em. Not a Martian in 'em! But ME. Imagine having one of them lovely things with its heat ray wide and free! I'd turn it on Martians. Hell, I'd turn it on men. I'd bring everybody down to their knees.

PIERSON

That's your plan?

WRIGLEY

I'd own the world.

PIERSON

I see...

Welles begins walking to Ollie's soundboard.

WRIGLEY

Say, what's the matter?...Where are you going?

PIERSON

Not to your world. Goodbye, stranger.

Click. Off air. Welles smiles. That was close.

WRIGLEY

Now hang on a minute. You must know something I don't.

WELLES

What do you mean?

WRIGLEY

I mean, you must've known this would happen.

WELLES

I don't follow.

WRIGLEY

65

Come on! The martians. You must've known there'd be martians!

WELLES

Of course I knew there'd be martians! I wrote it!

WRIGLEY

No! I mean out there!

Officer Wrigley points to the windows. Welles and his cast are perplexed.

WRIGLEY

How did you make the martians happen?

WELLES

Officer, let me tell you something about what we do here in this building. The rule used to be this: I talk, you listen. That's it. I talk, you listen. Then, somewhere along the line, it became I sell, you listen. Then it became I sell, you buy. And we can't make the scale tip the other way. Now, if I just want to talk, you just want to buy. So you ask: how did I make the martians happen? I talked.

WRIGLEY

I know what I saw! People zapped right out of existence! People burned to death with that heat ray!

WELLES

You didn't see it! It's all fake! It's just a magic trick. And what is a magician? A magician is just an actor. An actor playing the part of a magician. Now, if you'll excuse us...

WRIGLEY

Now, you hold on just a minute. Something awful funny about you, fella. The lot of you. (*He points to the actors.*) Him...Mabel...the other guy.

WELLES

I said that'll be all. The next time I come in this building I'll be whistling the Campbell's Soup jingle, too hot for you to dare lay a finger on me.

WRIGLEY

Something real funny. You're proud. Your head's held high. You show all your teeth when you smile...even while the world goes U-shaped out there.

66

WELLES

First time I've been complimented by a man of the badge.

WRIGLEY

You talk good. Better than me, even. Now how do you figure that?

WELLES

Call it a side effect of working in radio.

WRIGLEY

Or an act. No way you're Orson Welles. I don't care who says it.

CANADA

But he is.

WRIGLEY

(*Turning on Canada*) I wasn't talking to you, was I?

CANADA

No, sir.

WRIGLEY

You tryin' to start trouble?

CANADA

No, sir.

WRIGLEY

How about you, Mabel?

EDNA

My name's not Mabel.

WRIGLEY

(To Ollie.) What about you? *(He fiddles with his noisemaking devices.)* Any of these weapons?

OLLIE

No, sir.

WRIGLEY

67

Yeah...something not right about the whole room full of you. Just like the sky's not right. *(He gets in Welles' face.)* You know what I think? I think you're one of them.

Welles laughs.

WRIGLEY

I say something funny?

WELLES

No. You're right. I'm a martian. Ya got me. Come on! If I'm a martian, and I've been observing the planet for centuries, why on earth would I choose to hide in the body of a Black man?

WRIGLEY

I don't know, but you're not fooling anyone. I think...I think I'd feel a lot better if every one of you got down on your knees right now.

WELLES

(To the other actors.) Don't do it. Don't you dare lower yourself in front of this idiot.

WRIGLEY

No, no, no. I say, you do. That's how this works.

WELLES

Any of you does what he says, I'll clock you myself.

WRIGLEY

I say "Drop to your knees," and you drop to your knees! That's the way it goes!

WELLES

He's scared. He's a sad, scared little man.

WRIGLEY

No he's not! How's this for a headline: Police Station Cop, Just One Week on the Job, Becomes National Hero After Saving Country From Martian Attack.

WELLES

I have a better one: Bumbling Beat Cop Believes Preposterous Notion That Country can be Saved From Anything.

WRIGLEY

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You wanna talk about headlines? How about the one about your beloved Harlem. A whole neighborhood starts a riot over a made up story. You think I don't have buddies still recovering in the hospital because of your thug friends? That nonsense never happened when that neighborhood was Italian. But don't worry. *(He taps his badge.)* The boys in blue made sure to pay Harlem an extra special visit this evening.

This lands on the actors. There's a pause that feels like a moment of silence for a whole neighborhood.

CANADA

Orson, maybe...just...go on the air. Tell everyone the truth. Do it for Harlem.

WELLES

No, Canny! Don't let him get in your head. We're finally in control of the narrative. That's what's best for Harlem. For all of us, everywhere.

EDNA

Orson. We've done plenty.

WELLES

We're about to cash the biggest check of our lives, and you want to bail out?! *Was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself?*

CANADA

Orson, be sensible, please...

WELLES

NO! For the last fucking time! No!

Officer Wrigley takes out his gun and points it at Welles. Ollie, panicking, accidentally bumps against the Applause button on his console, illuminating the Applause sign above the stage.

WRIGLEY

See? I'm not the villain here. You are. And I'm giving you three seconds to call it

off. One. *The actors slowly put their hands in the air. Welles does not. He speaks*

as if to pray.

WELLES

O yes,
I say it plain...

69

Officer Wrigley's gun trembles at the end of his arm as the Applause sign blinks on.

WRIGLEY

Two.

SQ 360 as saying 2

WELLES

America never was America to me,

And yet I swear this oath—

Canada, Edna, and Ollie are frozen. They aren't breathing. Nobody breathes.

WELLES

America will be!

WRIGLEY

Three!

BOOM! Something huge and undeniable has reared up outside the studio windows, its gears groaning like roars bouncing off the skyscrapers. The actors, Welles, and Wrigley all turn to face the behemoth with awe as it hums and clicks.

Then, a crisp beam of brilliant blue light pierces through the glass and finds the chest of Officer Wrigley. A terrible spooling sound grows in volume as the beam intensifies and Wrigley screams. The lights in the studio flicker as the sound of the martian machine grows louder and louder, until...

Blackout. The spooling sound lowers in volume and pitch, and the tripod marches away with heavy, crunching stomps. Lights slowly rise on the studio. Officer Wrigley is gone.

Orson Welles and the actors are stunned. They look to each other for some explanation that none of them can give. The actors' gazes fall to Welles, their fearless leader, who for the first time cannot find words. And he doesn't find them for a long time.

Eventually, he moves. With stilted, unsure steps he makes his way to the On Air button at Ollie's station and flips it on. Then he walks to his microphone and makes the hardest decision of his life. When the words come, he says them.

WELLES

70

This is Orson Welles, ladies and gentlemen, out of character to assure you that The War of The Worlds has no further significance than as the holiday offering it was intended to be. The Mercury Theatre's own radio version of dressing up in a sheet and jumping out of a bush and saying Boo! Starting now, we couldn't soap all your windows and steal all your garden gates by tomorrow night. So we did the best next thing. We annihilated the world before your very ears, and utterly destroyed the CBS. You will be relieved, I

365 (possible autofollow)

LQ 25 (When zack goes to the door) bumps with steps

LQ26 when lazer changes sound (Strobe) Immediately after Manual Flash Sub 1 ray bumps as lazer hit

Sub 12 (fog)

LQ 27 at end of loud lazer (black)

LQ 28 back from martian

LQ 29

hope, to learn that we didn't mean it, and that both institutions are still open for business. So goodbye everybody, and remember the terrible lesson you learned tonight. That grinning, glowing, globular invader of your living room is an inhabitant of the pumpkin patch, and if your doorbell rings and nobody's there, that was no Martian. It's Halloween.

SQ375

The Mercury Theatre theme blares as the lights fade to black.

71

LQ 30 - Fade to black

EPILOGUE

Over the blackness, a voice.

SQ 380

VOICE

November 6, 1938.

Lights rise on the studio a week later. Canada, Edna, Ollie, and Welles are making their final preparations for the night's broadcast. Welles' left eye is bandaged. The can of Campbell's soup has not been removed from its perch above the door.

LQ 31- Lobby and studio light

Canada and Edna annotate their scripts at their stations. Canada stops and looks on at Welles, who is conferring with Ollie.

CANADA

*Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.*

EDNA

That, or he still isn't sleeping.

CANADA

I haven't gotten a full night of sleep since. Have you?

EDNA

Ask the fresh set of satin sheets I just bought if I'm getting my

forty winks. *They laugh. John pokes his head in and gives the cue.*

JOHN

One minute, friends.

ALL
Thank you, one.

CANADA
John.

Canada beckons John over.

72

CANADA
Any word from the kid?

JOHN
Nothing. You?

CANADA
No.

EDNA
Me neither.

JOHN
Orson said it's an open invitation.

EDNA
Even after he caved in the man's eye?

CANADA
Well...stranger things.

EDNA
Too true.

JOHN
Break legs. I'm listening.

John exits. Welles gets set at his station. Ollie grabs a record, puts it on the turntable, and cues it up. Canada and Edna flip through their scripts one last time before air.

EDNA

And... So... We're not saying it, yes?

CANADA

Orson said we're not saying it. Said he would've struck it from all our scripts if he had time.

EDNA

But we would have said it otherwise?

CANADA

73

I guess so.

EDNA

On air? You can say it?

CANADA

I guess so. CBS signed off.

EDNA

Sunday night, 8:00pm, you can say it?

CANADA

Edna, what do you want me to do?

Edna stands there for a moment, a bit stunned.

CANADA

You okay?

EDNA

It's just...hitting me a little funny. I...

Edna stops, puzzled. She's trying to put it all together.

EDNA

Canny?

CANADA
Yes, Edna?

EDNA
Who do we even work for?

Canada motions to the can of Campbell's soup above the door.

CANADA
Behold your god.

Canada returns to his script. Edna breathes it all in. Welles raises a hand to call the broadcast to order. He motions to Ollie who presses play on the record player. On air.

74

SQ 390

CANADA
The makers of Campbell's Soups Presents: The Campbell Playhouse. Orson Welles, producer.

The familiar Mercury Theatre theme has been replaced by a newer, grander theme, which plays triumphantly and finishes in a mighty flourish. Welles smiles at his cast, then cues Canada.

SQ395 Volume up

CANADA
Now before we introduce you to the man of the hour, a word from our sponsor. To nearly everyone it seems to me the words "Chicken for Dinner" have a thrilling sound. They bring thoughts of delightful eating, the kind we associate with holidays and special occasions.

The door to the studio quietly opens. Wardell enters. Welles stops cold.

CANADA
Think as far back as you can among your own families' favorite foods, or those of any family you've ever visited. Can you remember any dish more widely prized than chicken?

Wardell looks to Edna, Canada, and Ollie, who don't know what to make of his being here. Canada pushes on.

CANADA

Well, I think this widespread liking for chicken accounts, to a large degree, for the tremendous popularity of Campbell's Chicken Soup. And I can promise you that as sure as you like chicken, you'll like Campbell's Chicken Soup.

Wardell approaches Welles, who comes from behind his microphone to stand face to face with his former comrade. They regard each other for a few moments, sharing tension and breath.

CANADA

It's chicken through and through, from its golden surface to the bottom of your plate. Its broth glistens with chicken richness. Its fluffy rice is filled with chicken flavor, and there are tempting tender pieces of chicken meat.

Welles breaks with Wardell, and goes to his briefcase. He pulls out a script and walks back over to him. A pause. Welles extends the script toward Wardell, who, after a few tense moments, slowly and carefully accepts it.

CANADA

75

During the last five years, people everywhere have discovered how downright good and homey Campbell's Chicken Soup is. If you haven't tried it, why don't you? Because I'm sure you'll pronounce it every bit as fine as the best chicken soup you've ever tasted. How about this weekend?

Welles and Wardell nod to each other, and Wardell assumes his post next to Canada and Edna.

CANADA

And now we present the Campbell Playhouse's production of **Huckleberry Finn**, starring **Orson Welles**.

SQ 400

Ollie puts on some jaunty Huckleberry Finn-esque music from the long-ago south, which he plays for a moment and fades down as Welles takes the mic.

WELLES

Good evening. This is Orson Welles. The inaugural story of the newly minted Campbell Playhouse, by popular demand, is Huckleberry Finn. Also with us tonight are Canada

Lee, Edna Thomas, Ollie Simmons, and Wardell Saunders, awaiting their cues to play as many of the Mark Twain characters as we could cram into a single broadcast, albeit with some minor...corrections. But right now, I'd like to read to you in a loud, clear voice Mark Twain's words, which are printed on the title page of tonight's story. I quote: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted. Persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished. Persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot, by order of the author." And now, CBS would like me to read the following as an appendix to my previous statement at the close of our last show from October 30th.

SQ 405

Welles readies himself and reads from a sheet of paper.

WELLES

"The executive staff of CBS bears no responsibility for the events that occurred during and after last week's broadcast of The War of the Worlds."

Welles points sharply at Ollie, who turns off Welles' mic. Off air.

WELLES

We at CBS are a gaggle of chickenshits who are too cowardly to put our necks on the line for the sake of art.

He points again at Ollie. On air.

76

WELLES

"The events of that night were the sole envisioning of one man. Orson Welles." *Off air.*

WELLES

We didn't realize we had a downright genius on the payroll.

On air.

WELLES

"We can promise you that Mr. Welles has been made aware that further errors of this kind will not be tolerated."

Off air.

WELLES

We have successfully, though strenuously, made Orson Welles our boy.

On air:

WELLES

“We are, however, incredibly pleased to welcome Campbell’s Soup to

the fold...” *Off air.*

WELLES

Cha-ching.

On air:

WELLES

“...and look forward to a long and fruitful partnership with America’s leading manufacturer of fine soups.”

Off air:

WELLES

God bless us, every one.

77

On air: Welles puts the paper away.

WELLES

We would like to thank you for inviting us back into your homes. We promise to take good care of you. And now, dear friends, without further ado, we ask you to open your ears, huddle close, and listen.....

The Campbell’s Playhouse theme plays. Welles steps away from his microphone and walks slowly over to the doorway, eyeing the can of Campbell’s soup. He stops in front of it, his arms at his sides, his head raised to meet its gaze. Then, he reaches up and takes the can down, holding it delicately in one hand.

At that moment, static begins forming underneath the sounds of the Campbell’s Playhouse theme, static that rises as Welles walks to the center of the stage, his eyes

SQ 420

SQ 425 Actors exited,
Nathan yells

LQ 32 campbells can
(after set)

LQ 33 on can out
LQ 34 curtain call

