

**WAR OF THE WORLDS**

**by John Judy**

(Written for "Big News" January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005)

**(Lights up on the cast of the Mercury Theatre Radio Company, ORSON WELLES, AGNES MOOREHEAD, JOHN HOUSEMAN, JOSEPH COTTEN, BURGESS MEREDITH, EVERETT SLOANE, HELEN HAYES, and VIRGINIA "MRS."WELLES. Composer BERNARD HERRMAN is also present.)**

ORSON: Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. America. On behalf of myself, the Mercury Theatre On the Air, and our sponsors, we'd like to welcome you to tonight's dramatization of a Presidential Inauguration, hopefully in a time far off or never to be. In our theatre of the mind, I invite you to cast your imagination to a land in which truth is treason, deception is virtue, and all measures of international modesty have been cast aside like the robes over the withered teat of Lady Justice. But first this brief intermission.

BURGESS: The Mercury Theatre On The Air is brought to you by Blue Flame Anthracite. Hot burning coal for your household. Blue Flame: Shearing the tops off mountains for a warmer tomorrow. And by Carcino Solvents: We're safe for your family... or darn near. And now, back to our show...

**(SFX: Crowd noise, hubbub.)**

ORSON: The Nation-Wide Radio Network interrupts this broadcast to bring you this breaking news. We take you now to Princeton University where scientists are making an announcement.

AGNES: Good evening, I'm Marjorie Merriwether, girl reporter. I'm here at the Princeton Observatory where Professor Wiseman is about to speak.

**(Hubbub. "Professor! Professor Wiseman!")**

HOUSEMAN: Yes, I am Professor Wiseman, chief scientist in the science department, here at the university....

EVERETT: Professor! Joe Cooley of the Evening Herald, morning edition! Is it true you have an announcement?!

HOUSEMAN: Yes, but I'd caution you gentlemen of the fourth estate not to make too much of it. Every time we scientists make even the least little discovery it seems the press just won't let up until it's thoroughly covered. Why, to read the morning and evening papers, you'd think there were no movie stars or sporting events going on in the world with all the science, science, science....

**(SFX: Horse walks through the news conference. Hubbub.)**

AGNES: Hey! Who let that horse in here?!

**(SFX: Low-flying prop airplane)**

HOUSEMAN: Obviously he was chasing the airplane. Now, if I may? Our astronomers have recently detected several explosions of hot gas from the vicinity of Texas, Midland or Crawford, thereabouts. We believe it to be nothing more than routine volcanic activity, common to that part of the planet. That is all.

AGNES: Professor, isn't it possible that these explosions are hostile acts, the prelude to an invasion by some hideous alien power?

**(SFX: Laughter.)**

HOUSEMAN: You see, boys? This is why there are no women scientists.

AGNES: What about Madame Curie?

HOUSEMAN: Shut up. The idea of some alien power of incalculable malevolence originating from Texas is absurd. From what we know, Texas barely supports life at all, let alone life that could exist outside of a pair of pointy-toed cowboy boots and soiled dungarees.

**(SFX: Whistle being blown.)**

HOUSEMAN: Hmm, sounds like the swim meet's begun. I have to go.

VIRGINIA: Professor! This just came over the wire! I ran it all the way from the steno pool!

HOUSEMAN: What does it say, Miss Jones?

VIRGINIA: I don't know, sir. It's all little dots and dashes....

JOSEPH: It's Morse code, you silly girl! Here, I served in the Great War, let me see it. Hmm. Massive seismic impacts in Washington, DC. Stop. Strange lights emanating from the White House. Stop. Terrible screams at the Supreme Court. And then it just stops.

**(SFX: Hubbub.)**

ORSON: The Nation-Wide Radio Network will rejoin the news conference at Princeton when they have something more definite to report. Or when they win a football game. We now resume our broadcast of the Bill Brady Orchestra's "Thursday Night Swing" from the Rhumba Room high atop New York's famed Morgan skyscraper.

**(SFX: Slow ballad music. Suddenly there is the sound of newsroom commotion.)**

ORSON: We interrupt this program for a military alert from Washington DC. We are receiving reports of a series of large metallic objects scattered along the National Mall. They are marked only with the word "Hummer."

HELEN: Sir! Mister Boss!

ORSON: What is it, Hattie?

HELEN: Please sir, I has to go! I gots family in the Capital!

ORSON: Then stop interrupting our broadcast and go!

HELEN: Oh, lordy, what I do now?

**(SFX: Door opens. Car horn. Door closes.)**

HELEN: Taxi!

ORSON: As broadcasters whose first responsibility is to the public good, we here at Nation-Wide must emphasize the

importance of not panicking. We go now to Skip Pearson in DC.

**(SFX: Screams.)**

BURGESS: Merciful God, we're all going to die!

ORSON: Skip! Can you hear me?

BURGESS: Mommy-mommy-mommy!

ORSON: Pearson! Pull yourself together man!

**(Silence. Commercial comes on.)**

AGNES: My word, Joan! How do you keep your house so warm in the dead of winter?

VIRGINIA: That's easy, Mary. My husband keeps my coal chute stocked with Blue Flame anthracite!

AGNES: Blue Flame Anthracite?

VIRGINIA: Darn tootin'! After that colored family downtown froze to death, Jim swore we'd never be without it.

EVERETT: Mommy, me and Rosebud are going sledding!

VIRGINIA: Did you stoke the furnace with Blue Flame Anthracite, Skipper?

EVERETT: Yes ma'am!

VIRGINIA: Good boy.

**(SFX: Door slams)**

JOSEPH: Blue Flame Anthracite: For warm hearths. And hearts.

**(SFX: static burst.)**

ORSON: Right, Pearson. We're coming back live in three, two.... Ladies and gentlemen, we appear to be in the midst of something extraordinary in Washington. Our reporter, Skip Pearson is on the scene. Skip?

**(SFX: Sounds of carnage, sirens, flame)**

BURGESS: The carnage is unbelievable. Just minutes ago these strange, alien "Hummers" arrived on the mall and began disgorging their passengers, hundreds of pasty, low-browed creatures which scientists are calling "Neo-Conservatives." Their huge feet barely hit the ground before they raced off to dismantle some of our most sacred institutions: The Geneva Convention, the EPA, the Constitution itself.

ORSON: My God, Skip. What about the military?

BURGESS: They've all been sent overseas by the Neo-Cons!

ORSON: Is there no one to oppose these creatures?

BURGESS: I'm told there is an opposition movement, but they're too busy taking polls and focus groups to fight the Neo-Cons! That's the worst part of this mess: The collaborators! The Neo-Cons actually have the support of 51 percent of the people!

ORSON: Dear God, a clear mandate....

BURGESS: Wait, one of the Hummers is turning this way... It sees me! It's coming toward me! Faster, faster....

**(SFX: Tires screeching, engine revving, BURGESS being hit.)**

BURGESS: Aaahhh!

ORSON: Pearson! Skip!

HELEN **(as Hattie)**: Shit! They done run that white boy over!

ORSON: Hattie? Is that you?

HELEN: Mister Boss?

ORSON: Hattie, how did you get to DC so quickly?

HELEN: Oh, I know lots of short-cuts, Mister Boss.

ORSON: Hattie, what's happening down there? What are the Neo-Cons doing?

HELEN: Oh lordy, what ain't they doin'? They cuttin' taxes on the rich, slashing social services, rollin' back the environmental p'fections... Oh, and they goin' to war with just about everybody they see. "For the Freedom", they says.

ORSON: Hattie, listen to me. You've got to be the eyes and ears of the nation. Only you are there. Only you can keep us informed.

HELEN: Say what?

ORSON: The Neo-Cons are obviously neutralizing all the journalists who dare to report the truth.

HELEN: Well, then Mister Boss, you gonna have to pay me more.

ORSON: What?

HELEN: Hell, yeah! Them Neo-Cons done increased my prescription drug costs and raised tuition costs for my grandchildren. I gots to get paid!

ORSON: Hattie, we'll work something out....

HELEN: Oh, Lordy, here comes one o' them Neo-Cons, right now....

**(SFX: Neo-Con Voice. Sounds like the grown-ups on Charlie Brown Specials.)**

HELEN: What? I'm just talking to the radio about what y'all doin here....

HOUSEMAN **(as Neo-Con)**: "wuh-whuh, etc"

HELEN: I ain't no damn Al Qaeda operative!

HOUSEMAN: Whuh-whuh?

HELEN: 'Course I love Freedom!

HOUSEMAN: Whuh-whuh!

HELEN: I ain't goin' to no Guantanamo Bay Prison! Negro, get your damn hands offa me! Mister Boss, help!!!

**(SFX: Tires screeching, Hattie being dragged away.)**

ORSON: Hattie! Hattie!

HOUSEMAN: **(pause)** Whuh-whuh? **(Laughter.)**

ORSON: God, I've got to get out of here before they come for me too!

**(Intermission Music up.)**

EVERETT: The Mercury Theatre On The Air is brought to you by Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola. It gives you that extra "pep" and you don't have to inject it.

ORSON: I'm broadcasting to you now from the basement of our once proud studios here at the Nation-Wide Radio Network. Like some smuggled refugee, I whisper my supplications to our merciful Creator in hopes that He will deliver me from this tribulation. I feel like I may be the last Moderate on Earth, as the Neo-Cons spread like deficit-spending mold above me. But wait! I hear a door opening! Have they found me? Will I be re-educated? Sent to serve as some Fundamentalist Preacher's concubine in the New Order? Stay back! I'm armed!

**(SFX: Arrow hitting tree.)**

JOSEPH: Here now, put down your bow and arrow. Are you alright?

ORSON: You tell me. Are you with the invaders?

JOSEPH: Why, perish forbid! My name's Keynes. I'm an Nobel prize winning economist.

ORSON: And the Neo-Cons let you live?

JOSEPH: Why, they've nothing to say about it! Come upstairs into the light.

**(SFX: stairs creaking, birds chirping, running water.)**

JOSEPH: See, the Neo-Cons are all dead.

ORSON: Praise be to heaven! But what killed them?

JOSEPH: Well, at first we thought it they'd been smothered by their stock portfolios or killed by their own gay children, but then we realized it was something much simpler that did them in.

ORSON: What was it?

JOSEPH: Basic Math. The Neo-Cons in their arrogance tried to slash taxes while at the same time engage in costly military adventurism around the globe. It defied natural and economic law. No creature under heaven could hope to sustain that level of spending without raising taxes on its wealthiest citizens. In the end they all died of bankruptcy.

ORSON: Bankruptcy. The one thing for which the Neo-Cons had no natural defense. Thank God our national nightmare is over at last.

JOSEPH: Oh no, it's just beginning. We're going to be paying off their national debt until your grandchildren have dentures. Sorry.

ORSON: Fuck me with a carp.

**(Outro music rises.)**

EVERETT: This concludes tonight's broadcast of the Mercury Theatre On The Air. What you have just heard is a dramatization. It did not really happen and never could because nobody is stupid enough to actually vote for a Neo-Conservative. Or are they...?

**(Outro music climaxes and so does everyone listening to it.)**

**BLACKOUT.**