

"War of the Worlds: A History"

By Stanley Robinson



This summer, so far, has seen May's blockbuster "Star Wars: Episode III, Return of the Sith". June had "Batman Begins". And, July adds this retelling of the H.G. Wells classic story of Martians invading Earth, "War of the Worlds"!

I'm a baby boomer, which means I was born in a time without TV! As a child, I did the normal things of the time. Outdoors, played sports and games. Indoors, I listened to radio dramas like *The Inner Sanctum*, *The Shadow*, and westerns like *Gunsmoke*! I also read a lot. Everything from comics to novels. Some favorites included the Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew mysteries, Ian Fleming's books, and Sc-Fi by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. Wells' writings had a way of weaving the ordinary person into the role of hero in his stories.

H.G Wells, (1866-1946), The English novelist, journalist, sociologist, and historian, is most famous for his works of science fiction. Well's best-known books are *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War Of The Worlds* (1898). H.G. Wells was born on September 21, 1866 in Bromley, Kent England. His father was a shopkeeper and a professional cricketer. His mother served as a housekeeper at the nearby estate of Uppark in England.

George Orson Welles, (1915-1985), is considered one of Hollywood's greatest directors, as well as a fine actor, broadcaster and screenwriter. His first feature film, *Citizen Kane* (1941), is universally acknowledged as an important step in the history of cinema and widely cited by critics as among the best films ever made, and is one of this filmmaker's all time favorites.



H.G. Wells



Orson Welles

The first dramatized version of "War of the Worlds" I experienced was the Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater Players radio production. The first time it was actually heard was in 1938. I heard it in the early 1950's, as it was a tradition to play it on radio during Halloween each year! The little known actor, Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre Players, presented the hour long radio drama production of "War of the Worlds" by H.G. Wells in 1938. Little did they know the amount of national press their show would receive! The

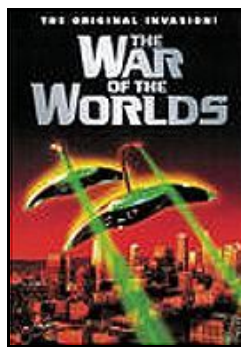
headline from the NY Times on Oct 31st, 1938 read: *"Radio listeners in panic, taking war drama as fact! Many flee homes to escape 'gas raid from Mars', and phone calls swamp police at broadcast of Wells fantasy!"*

Since then, the FCC has made it mandatory for disclaimers and break-ins for all broadcast medium that present dramatized shows that simulate catastrophic or realistic events.

In 1953, with a 2 million dollar budget and George Pal producing, and Byron Haskin directing the H.G. Wells classic, "War of the Worlds", came to the big screen starring Gene Barry as the scientist who helps save Earth! This film, along with another Wells classic, "The Time Machine" (1960) starring Rod Taylor, also produced by Pal, were sci-fi main stays of the time and highly successful at the box office!



Martian spacecraft



Poster 1953



Gene Barry, Ann Robinson

"War of the Worlds", 2005. This version of "War of the Worlds" is based on the original "War of the Worlds" novel by H.G. Wells, not the 1953 movie that had Gene Barry as a scientist who helps save Earth. This version, Starring Tom Cruise, Dakota Fanning, Tim Robbins, and Justin Chatwin, has its focus on a man who's main objective is to save his family during a Martian invasion.

Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) is a working class man who lives in New Jersey. Estranged from his family, his life out of order, and caught up with himself, the unthinkable and, ultimately, the unexpected happens to him in an extraordinary sense. The town is shaken violently by the arrival of Martians that have come in force to destroy Earth! The Martians plow through the country in a wave of mass destruction and violence, and Ray must come to the defense of his children. As the world must fend for itself by a new and very advanced enemy not of this world, it's inhabitants must save humanity from a far greater force that threatens to destroy it.

The "buzz" is that Paula Wagner and Kathleen Kennedy, two of the most powerful women in Hollywood, made this project happen. It's said that Steven Spielberg had the remake for "War of the Worlds" on his backburner since the 1990's. Tom Cruise's producing partner Paula Wagner, and Kathleen Kennedy, Steven Spielberg's business partner, reached an agreement and worked out the fine details of getting their respective partners involved. Tom had temporarily put "Mission Impossible 3" on hold while looking for a new

director and Steven was waiting for the "Indiana Jones IV" script. The timing was right for both parties to collaborate.

With Spielberg back at home in his sci-fi realm and Cruise being the world's biggest and most bankable star, all that was needed was to have Paramount Pictures, Tom Cruise's projects outlet, open a prime release window for the new version of "War of the Worlds" by these two industry giants! Paramount, needing a big blockbuster hit since the last project to turn a good profit for them was "Mean Girls", came up with the nine figure budget and convince 20th Century Fox to move their movie, "Fantastic Four", to free up the 4th of July weekend for release! "War of the Worlds" opens June 29, 2005.



The cards are on the table, as they say. The 3 films in contention for blockbuster status this summer are: "Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith", the latest from George Lucas; "Batman Begins", the restart of the tested tried and true Batman franchise, directed by Christopher Nolan; and "War of the Worlds", the remake of the classic with super giants Tom Cruise and Steven Spielberg as director, collaborating.

Who will emerge as the box office winner for 2005? No, I'm not making a prediction! All three films will be box office winners. I happen to like the chances of all three films for 3 different reasons! And all three will be highly profitable, each in their own right. The real winner by the time the summer ends will be the moviegoers with 3 good movies to see!



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