FIFTY years ago, Orson Welles con-
vinced many Americans tbat crea-
tures from the planet Mars had
invaded New Jersey.

"War of the Worlds", broadcast, as
a radio play on October 30, 1938,
revealed man's fear - and fascination
- at the thought of alien contact. Lis-
teners thought that the simulated
news broadcast was really warning
them that hoardes of outer beings
were on their way.

Modern audiences might not panic
when Welles' voice booms across the
airwaves again to commemorate the
broadcast's 50th anniversary. Most
people would assert that we are too
sophisticated to fall for such fantasy.

Yet governments continued to
pump money into space research to
discover what is out there and science
fiction fans abound. Alien beings,
imagined or real, still invade the
human psyche. Although 1988 audi-
ences are unlikely to identify with the
helpless victims of creatures from
Mars, evidence suggests that they still
believe something or someone -
events beyond the planet Earth.

Popular movies like Star Wars por-
tray man fighting against, and
socializing with, a host of wierd and
wacky aliens. The various forms and
talents of these creatures are limited
only by the human imagination.

The technology that enables us to
"go where no man has gone before" is
inspired by the same urge that moved
H.G. Wells to write "War of the
Worlds" - the need to feel we are not
alone.

Primitive man's earth was the only
planet, around which revolved a mys-
tical heaven full of strange beings and
inexplicable forces. Not only were
these beings aware of man's exis-
tence, they actually controlled his
destiny. Rituals, beliefs and myths
allowed man to engage in dialogue
with these beings that would ensure
the proper amount of rain, sun and
other ingredients of a good life.

Ancient cultures also relied heavily
on aliens as fodder for their myths.

BY DIANE BRADY

Gods, goddesses and an assortment
of other beings would zoom down
from the sky for good or ill. Once
there, they would perform some feat
or create something that mere mort-
tals could barely understand and
never hope to repeat. Like the primi-
tive alien, these beings were actively
engaged in human existence.

What man has never been fully
table to explain has often been pro-
jected into the heavens. Beings there
could possess strange powers not pos-
sible on earth. Until the age of Sci-
ences in the sixteenth century, these
creatures were limited to the religious
realm.

Copernicus' theory that the earth
revolved around the sun with numer-
ous other planets relegated us to a
humbler status in the universe. But it
also opened up a range of possibilities
for other life forms to exist. Indeed,
the invention of the telescope backed
up the theory by revealing more
creatures that were basking in the sun's
light than previously imagined.

Strange creatures began to pop out
of literature from planets far, far
away. Indeed, they were flying to our
planet well before we thought we
would ever be able to fly around it
ourselves. Science fiction carved out
a healthy market in the nineteenth
century with writers like H.G. Wells
beginning to find fame.

Industrial and technological prog-
ress has increased our preoccupation
with alien contact. With special
effects and realistic make-up, we can
create more authentic alien in our
movies. Space exploration and radar
technology force us to actually begin
our search, instead of just thinking
about it.

Indeed, the only difference be-
 tween frightened radio listeners in
1938 and today's audience is that,
now, we are likely to be the invaders.

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