

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Rachel Perkins, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, October 21, 2026.

Aliens from space are about to invade Port Townsend – not once or twice, but three times before the month is out. The otherworldly strangers will descend on this community, swooping down on KPTZ during, of all things, the radio station's fall fund drive.

Wait, what?

As it happens, the full-scale invasion will begin on the 88th anniversary of another Martian onslaught. The attack, in fact a full-scale radio drama, was known in October 1938 as "The War of the Worlds" and in 2026, it will arrive in rural Jefferson County.

With Saltfire Theatre's cast of DJs, kayakers, seagulls, and other folk, "Worlds" will collide on October 27, 28 and 30. The first two performances will begin at 7pm before live audiences inside Building 305 – KPTZ's home base – at Fort Worden State Park.

Then the finale at 7pm Friday, October 30 will be broadcast live from the radio station's performance studio for listeners who tune in to 91.9 FM or kptz.org. Tickets to the live in-person readings are available at saltfiretheatre.org and, if any are left, at the door of Building 305.

For the October 30 broadcast, no ticket is required; just a radio or an internet connection will open the door to "Worlds." While it is inspired by Orson Welles' Depression-era radio drama, the Saltfire-KPTZ creation is its own animal, adapted by local thespian Doug Caskey and shaped by its Jefferson County crew and cast.

"Each performance will be different," promises Genevieve Barlow, who is the artistic director of Saltfire Theatre and the director of this "War of the Worlds." She adds that staging this production is not only a marriage of two mediums, but also a many-tentacled collaboration among actors, sound effects creators, and broadcasters.

Together, Caskey and the cast have cooked up a tale studded with sci-fi Easter eggs. This production is inspired by the 1938 radio broadcast and by the original H.G. Wells novel from 1898, which had Martians wreaking havoc in Surrey, southwest of London.

But audiences will discover distinctly Port Townsend references, said Caskey, who serves on Saltfire's board of directors. Potholes, for example, will make appearances. Also different: the ending. Welles and Wells' versions were on the dark, moralistic side – "a bit much," Caskey said. The 2026 "Worlds" takes its own turn.

"The ending is different, but the message is still there," said Caskey.

The process of assembling this creature – a radio play about aliens, technology, human response, and nature – was extraordinarily collaborative, he added. Cast members made suggestions during rehearsals. Comic moments were mixed in like dark chocolate candy. It was a classic case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

For each audience member, Barlow offers an invitation: When you watch or listen to "The War of the Worlds," give yourself the time to be present, and let yourself be transported. The sound effects, created with tools and by the humans in the cast, are a major element of the production, she adds – and they're both funny and unnerving.

The cast brings together local theater luminaries including Michelle Hensel, Erik Van Beuzekom, Scott Bahlmann, Morgan Shepard, Charley Pope, Ciel Pope, Kirsten Louise Webb, Maude Eisele, and Libby Wennstrom. In a crossover from real life, KPTZ radio crew members Rachel Smith and Jim Burke portray DJs. And Brooke Webber, a newcomer to Saltfire, plays Faye the Kayaker and Tin Foil Tommy. Sound designer Austin Krieg is considered the 15th member of the cast, Barlow noted.

Saltfire, which enjoyed a successful run of “The Wind in the Willows” this past summer, is in its fourth year as a nonprofit theater company.

“We wanted to stretch and grow,” Barlow said, while offering audiences a radio drama for and about Port Townsend and Jefferson County. “Worlds” also gives us a chance, she added, to use our imagination muscles as we listen. Barlow and her crew hope people will choose to experience an in-person reading and the live broadcast.

“They are both thrilling,” she said.

Reporting on this story by Diane Urbani.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. This is rachel perkins. Thanks for listening.