“The Mars Room”: A Campus-wide Bioastronomy Project

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During 1997-1998, the University of Maryland at College Park’s Terrapin Reading Society used H. G. Wells’ novel “The War of the Worlds” as its book of the year. Meant to be read by all campus students and incorporated in classes by interested members of the teaching faculty, this novel focused attention on the fictional invasion of Earth by Martians and, by extension, the factual invasion of Mars by us via Pathfinder. To complement the use of this novel, the author created “The Mars Room”, housed in the Nonprint section of our undergraduate library and made available to the entire campus a wide range of materials, audio and visual cassettes, CD-ROMs (a Mars Room dedicated PC was available), 3-D photographs, posters, etc., related to fictional and factual representations of Mars. Individual students could use these materials (on their own or as part of class assignments/projects) or instructors could hold their classes in specially equipped Nonprint rooms. Instructors could also incorporate the available materials in lesson plans for their own classrooms. Hundreds of students and dozens of instructors have utilized this facility since its inception and, due to this success, The Mars Room will remain in place at least through 2001.