

# CHICAGO TRIBUNE Tweek

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## 'WAR OF THE WORLDS'

They're still alive! The sci-fi adventure continues



The 1953 movie [above left] gave viewers their first glimpse of a Martian spaceship. Now, in a new series, Richard Chaves, Lynda Mason Green and Jared Martin again have to thwart the alien invasion.



# Aliens are back to resume their 'War of Worlds'

By Barry Brown

**T**ORONTO—Unlike Orson Welles' 1938 radio play, the new "War of the Worlds" TV series will fool no one into thinking aliens are attacking Earth. But they might think that the aliens are already out there.

Forgotten by the human race after their first encounter, the aliens' bodies have been stored like hazardous waste in sites around North America. Now, they are coming back to life.

This time, they are a 40-minute drive north of Toronto in a place known as Shadow Lake. It is a late summer night, and a single, leafless tree eerily marks the site where these aliens are living. As the cameras roll, a "War of the Worlds" "alien wrecking crew" prepares to knock down a power line and electrocute the "invaders."

Who and what are the aliens? That is the question Dr. Harrison Blackwood [Jared Martin], Dr. Suzanne McCullough [Lynda Mason Green], Lt. Col. Paul Ironhorse [Richard Chaves] and Norton Drake [Philip Akin] have to solve every week if they want to prevent the extra-terrestrial parasites from destroying the world.

"War of the Worlds" opens with a two-hour premiere at 7 p.m. Friday on WPWR-Ch. 50. Weekly episodes will then follow from 7-8 p.m. Fridays beginning Oct. 14. [The two-hour pilot will be repeated on Oct. 7; weekly repeats of the series will air from 5-6 p.m. Saturdays, eight days after the original aired.]

Thematically, the aliens, according to producer Jon Hackett, are the same nearly invulnerable creatures that came to Earth in the H.G. Wells novel, the 1938 radio play and the 1953 movie that starred Gene Barry and Ann Robinson.

This time, however, the aliens have the ability to meld with human beings in order to accomplish their mission: destroy the human race so their planet's inhabitants can leave their own uninhabitable world.

"The aliens," Hackett said, "are like terrorists."

The TV aliens, like the ones in the movie, are only rarely and briefly seen in their alien form. Alien designer Bill Sturgeon said a few modifications have been made to meet the needs of weekly TV.

Closer to the aliens of the '53 movie than the sluglike creatures H.G. Wells described, the TV show's aliens have three black irises in their single eye, rather than the red, blue and green ones seen briefly



in the movie.

Despite the changes, which Sturgeon said are the result of "35 years of alien pickling," the aliens retain "that suckery, reptile feel."

Each member of the cast has his own perspective on the aliens. Jared Martin, who plays group leader and new age astrophysicist Dr. Harrison Blackwood, said the aliens should be seen as more than terrorists.

"Their planet is 40 light years away, so they can't get reinforcements or communicate," he said. "They have to devise plans to start wars, disasters and spread disease. They are the second coming of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

Like the other lead actors, Martin got his role through coincidence.

"I was walking across a shopping mall," he said, "and I got this weird impulse to

In the 1953 movie "War of the Worlds," starring Gene Barry and Ann Robinson [above], the aliens possessed a single eye containing red, blue and green irises. For the television series, three black irises have been substituted. At left, earthlings soon discover the radiation effects of the aliens' rays.

call my answering machine. You never do that on Saturday. It's a day off, agents aren't in. But I called and got this heated, panicky voice of my agent saying, 'You've got to go to Toronto tonight or the deal's off.'

The next night, "I was signing a contract on the bar of a [Toronto] hotel," he said.

Martin sees his character as a role model for kids who want an image of the intelligent, sensitive man as sexy and popular.

Born in New York and a resident of Los Angeles, Martin now lives in Toronto. His Victorian-style home is across from one of the city's oldest graveyards and crematoria, which, he said, is a great place to clear the mind.

Lynda Mason Green, who plays microbiologist Dr. Suzanne McCullough, single mother and working woman, is one of two lead members of the cast who is Canadian. Philip Akin is the other.

Born in Sarnia, Ont., just across the St. Clair River from Port Huron, Mich., Mason Green has had a string of parts in Canadian-American coproductions, including "Night Heat," but this is her first continuing lead role. Her "accident" that

Barry Brown is a freelance writer based in Toronto.

Continued on page 35

# Aliens

Continued from page 3

brought her to the part was in leaving Paris early "because my friends left me and my French was too bad to go around alone, so I came back" just in time for the audition.

On the series, the team's headquarters is the Cottage—an abandoned atomic test site 3,000 feet below the surface of the Earth. From there they seek out and neutralize the aliens who have come back to life.

McCullough's job "is to understand what virus destroyed them originally and what can combat them now. She is obsessive in trying to learn more about their immune system," Mason Green said.

Lt. Col. Paul Ironhorse is the military man. A Vietnam veteran who's part white, part Cherokee Indian, Ironside's martial skills and aboriginal powers are combined in a character that actor Richard Chaves describes as half-Patton and half-Daniel Boone. Chaves should know, he is all those things.

His mother, a Cherokee Indian from the Virginia-North Carolina area, married Chaves' father, a career marine. After spending the "first freakin' 18 years of my life on a Marine base," Chaves joined the Army and spent close to a year in Vietnam.

Chaves said although he had a low draft number, he enlisted early "for the same reasons that took Hemingway to Spain. You have to see and experience those things first hand."

When his tour of duty was over, Chaves said he came back to America broke, directionless and "looking like one of those concentration camp victims."

In the beginning, Chaves said, Ironhorse thinks the aliens are terrorists, "then he realizes this is the extraterrestrial enemy. The enemy you've never seen before. Not from another country but another universe."

Chaves' quirky relation with the show harks back to the 1953 movie.

"In 1964, my dad got stationed at El Toro Marine base. Ironically, in the '53 classic, that's where the marines come from," Chaves said.

Philip Akin said his character, Norton Drake—the black, paraplegic, computer-whiz technocrat—"has a lot of cans" tied on him.

"He's black, he was crippled and he's the technocrat. I felt like a car with 'Just Married' written on it and tin cans banging off the back," Akin said.

For Drake, the aliens "are a cipher to be cracked. I locate where they are and the wrecking crew goes out and does their stuff. Because I'm in a voice-activated wheelchair, I just tell Gertrude—my chair—what I want to do. It's a high-tech schtick that sometimes works and sometimes makes directors pull their hair out."

Producer Hackett said that the phenomenal success of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" as a first-run syndication series was behind the support Paramount has given "War of the Worlds."

But "War of the Worlds" is aiming for a different slice of the science-fiction market. Like "Star Trek," "War of the Worlds" is aimed at families and young people. What makes it different, cast members said, is an emphasis on suspense and action.

Hackett compares the show's potential appeal to the first "Alien" movie. In "War of the Worlds," "you don't see the aliens because it would destroy the mystery. If you see everything, the mystery is gone. You see parts of the aliens. You form an image. You get a sense of what they're about."