

## TELEVISION

# New 'War of the Worlds' quietly invades TV land

**H**AVE you heard? There's a war on.

"War of the Worlds," the syndicated series that's in the midst of its improved second season, is making quiet noise that we'd be wise to listen to.

The time is "almost tomorrow." The place is Earth, such as it is.

In the H.G. Wells story (which Orson Welles brought to life altogether too vividly for the radio audience of 1938), Earth is under attack by outer-space monsters. The television show has changed the aliens' point of origination from Mars to the distant Morthrai.

But their mission remains the same: to seek and destroy until this planet is theirs.

They could have quickly succeeded, too, but early on, the aliens were conquered by their physical limitations. Common earthling bacteria toppled their weak immune system.

That's where the 1953 movie version left off, and where the television series began in 1988. As it turned out, the Morthrens didn't really die; their complex molecular structure retreated into a form of suspended animation, sending the aliens into hibernation.

Of course, you don't have much of a show as long as the bad guys are sleeping. And so the series revived the aliens through accidental exposure to radioactive waste, which killed the bacteria

## ON TV

By Andee Beck

and put the Morthrens back to work.

Unfortunately, "War of the Worlds" didn't work artistically that first year. For this season, its Canadian production team and Paramount Pictures' distribution wing brought aboard a new executive producer (Frank Mancuso Jr.) and a powerful new direction.

Now, this war of the worlds isn't just some third-rate science fiction. It's a darkly evocative futuristic drama whose future is a minute and a half from now.

A second wave of aliens has descended upon an Earth that's ripe for the plucking. Our economy, our environment, our hope and faith are rapidly deteriorating. It would seem that all the Morthrens have to do is exploit our weaknesses as tools for our own destruction.

Since the first week of October, the Morthrens have used rock music to subliminally turn the lost youth into an army of assassins. They've secretly turned a devout minister into a seeming miracle worker whose real work is blinding people to the sinister truth. They've made guns and drugs accessible to hasten our demise.

And most frightening of all,



Paramount Pictures

Members of the Blackwood Project attempt to neutralize the alien invasion in "War of the Worlds." From left to right are Jared Martin, Adrian Paul and Lynda Mason Green.

they've exploited our paranoia by cloning themselves into human bodies. Now we don't know whom to trust.

The enemy would seem to be more than just among us. The enemy is us.

There is, however, a handful of heroes waging war for all the right reasons: Dr. Blackwood (Jared Martin), microbiologist Suzanne McCullough (Lynda Mason Green) and her promising 13-year-old daughter, Debi (Rachel Blanchard).

Driven underground when the aliens destroyed their headquarters, these members of the so-called Blackwood Project single-handedly neutralize the aliens' various, nefarious deeds while the rest of Earth's population is embroiled in greed, rage and rampant annihilation.

Nice place to visit but wouldn't want to live there.

A voice, reminiscent of Orson Welles' in his radio play, begs the question during the opening credits, "What is this world coming to?"

It's a question that's sure to swim through the viewer's head as each week "War of the Worlds" explores its grim vision of a world that's at war with itself.

It's not a pretty picture, but it is a remarkable series that boasts some of the best writing, acting, direction, musical scoring and production values that you'll find on television as we prepare to venture into the 1990s and beyond.

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