

## TELEVISION

# Screamer reprises film role in 'War of Worlds'

By Ron Miller  
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Fay Wray was the screamer in King Kong's paw. Mary Philbin was the screamer who unmasked *The Phantom of the Opera*. Julia Adams was the screamer who went swimming with *The Creature From the Black Lagoon*.

Then there's Ann Robinson. She was tapped on the shoulder by the sucker-fingered Martian in *The War of the Worlds* film. Many fans still remember Robinson's spine-tingling scream after 36 years.

"When I did that scene, nobody even knew if I could do it," Robinson says. "I just opened my mouth and screamed."

It was a doozy.

In the syndicated *War of the Worlds* series, which airs at 1 a.m. Sunday on WUAB (Channel 43), Robinson will reprise the Sylvia Van Buren role she played in 1953.

In 1953, Sylvia was a young University of Southern California library science instructor who was thrown together with the brilliant scientist Dr. Clayton Forres-

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**Ann Robinson,  
'War of Worlds' actress**

ter (Gene Barry) as they fled invading Martians in the Southern California desert.

Though the Martians "died" from exposure to Earth bacteria at the end of the 1953 film, the TV series tells us they went into suspended animation.

In 1989, the now-middle-aged Sylvia is a permanent resident in a sanitarium, still raving about "body-snatching" aliens. When a bag lady is committed to

the asylum after reporting a "body-snatching" to authorities, the two team up and escape.

Now middle-aged herself, the lively, red-haired Robinson is not embarrassed to be a living curio from a 1953 science-fiction classic. "Who would be embarrassed at being remembered for a genuine classic?" says Robinson.

Robinson had played only a few small movie parts before winning the Sylvia role in 1952. It was her first leading role and her first assignment under a new Paramount contract.

Afraid that her flaming red hair would be too distracting, producer George Pal forced Robinson to wear "that awful brown wig."

The film's — and Robinson's — unforgettable scene comes near the end. Dr. Forrester and Sylvia are hiding from the invaders in the ruins of a house when she hears a noise. With the camera in a tight close-up on her face, she turns slowly to see the suckers of an alien hand on her shoulder.

As she screams, the camera keeps

turning and we see our first glimpse of a Martian.

Actually, Robinson didn't "feel" the Martian fingers at all. She had to be cued to know the hand had been placed there.

"They had to wheel the Martian in on this little dolly," she recalls. "The man who worked the Martian was on his knees and his hands went into the Martian up to his elbows where he had three little rings to work the suckers. Somebody had to literally take his hand and place it on my shoulder, then scoot out of camera range."

Thirty years later, director Steven Spielberg, who saw the movie as a child, paid homage to that scene by reproducing it, suckered fingers and all, in his *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*.

After completing *War of the Worlds*, Robinson made a few more films, among them *The Glass Wall*, *Bad for Each Other* and the original *Dragnet*.

In 1957, she retired from acting, married a bullfighter and moved to Mexico, where she raised two sons. Divorced 10

years later, Robinson returned to Hollywood. Remarried, she concentrated on raising her sons and doing occasional movie and TV parts.

Then, in 1977, Robinson took part in publicity for a proposed reissue of *The War of the Worlds*.

Ever since, Robinson has attended science-fiction conventions and corresponded with fans.

When ads appeared in the Hollywood trade papers announcing the TV revival of *War of the Worlds*, she contacted Paramount and suggested reprising her original role. Paramount agreed.

"I'm the only link to the original picture in the TV series," said Robinson. "In my appearances, I always try to work in lines from the original movie because I know there's someone out there who wants to hear them."

Robinson thinks the writers are guilty of an appalling oversight. "So far they haven't had even one alien come up behind me and put his hand on my shoulder," she says. Those suckers still are out there, you know.

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