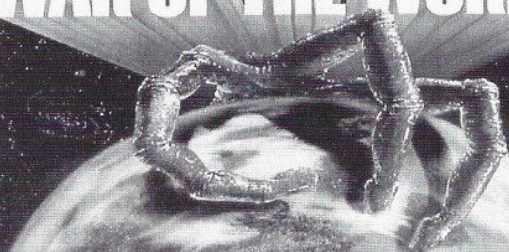




## WAR OF THE WORLDS™



Above: Ardix (Julian Richings) conspires with the alien Advocates in their radiation garments. Left: This promo title art was converted into live action as part of each episode's intro.

### *The 1988 TV Series That Took Up Where the 1958 Film Left Off!*

Article by **PRESLEY REESE**

**A**LTHOUGH IT LASTED ONLY TWO SEASONS, THE 1988-'90 Canadian-produced *War of the Worlds* television show was a curiously conceived sequel to the 1958 film. George Pal, the original film's producer, had envisioned a TV spin-off back in the 1970s, but it wasn't until the late 1980s that a new series, filmed in Toronto, Ontario,

Canada was realized by television producer Greg Strangis as part of a syndicated TV boom taking place at the time. The show later appeared in reruns on the then-named Sci-Fi Channel.

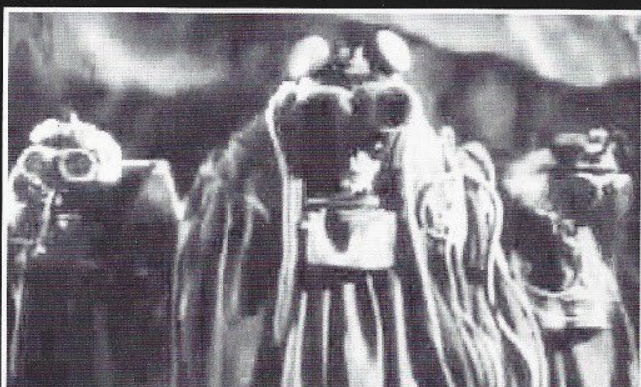
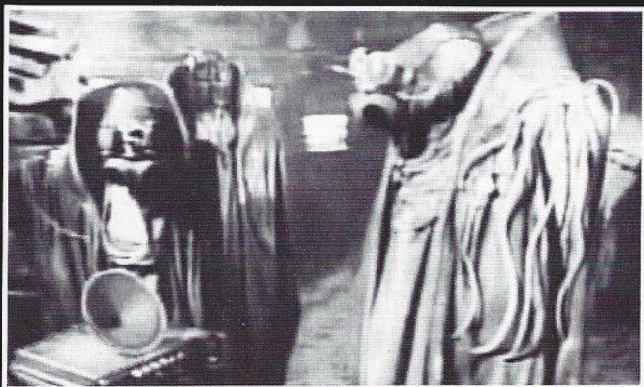
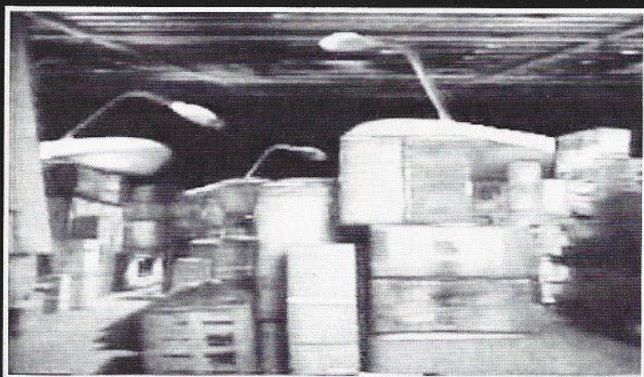
Taking place 30 years after the original movie had eradicated the aliens with deadly Earth bacteria, this revisionist series re-invented a world where aliens stored away in toxic waste drums are resurrected by an accidental exposure to radioactivity. After discovering this, scientist Harrison Blackwood (Jared Martin) organizes a reactionary movement to combat the alien menace with the help of a team of experts including micro-biologist Suzanne McCullough (Lynda Mason Green), computer programmer Norton Drake (Philip Akin), and army Col. Paul Ironhorse (Richard Chaves). While not as well remembered as "V," another 1980s series, *War of the Worlds* gained its own cult following with an unusual collection of bizarre storylines, dieselpunk design elements, and an atmosphere of creepy alien paranoia.

To further its premise as a continuation of the George Pal film, series producer Strangis also acquired the rights to incorporate the original Martian flying machines into the new series. But that is where any similarities ended. Rather than dying outright at the end of the 1958 film, the aliens enter a state of suspended animation, and their bodies are secretly stored away in toxic waste drums. A government cover-up is also created, utilizing a kind of "selective amnesia" to convince the citizenry that the invasion never happened. Although the 1958 movie identified the invad-



Stars of Season One, from left: Richard Chaves as Col. Paul Ironhorse, Lynda Mason Green as Suzanne McCullough, and Jared Martin as Harrison Blackwood.





Top row from left: The original 1953 Martian war machines are seen parked in Hanger 18. After blasting their way through the roof of the hanger, they pursue Chaves, McCullagh, and Blackwood across the airfield. Bottom: The Advocacy are a strange sight to behold in their makeshift radiation suits.

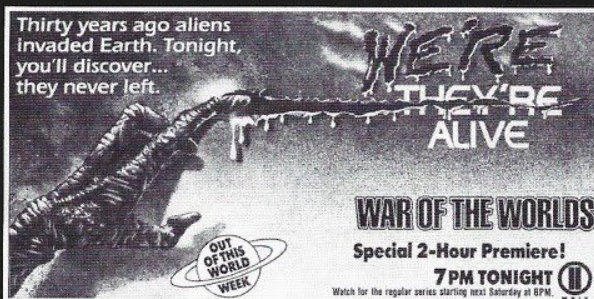
ers as Martians, scientific advancements such as video transmissions from Martian rovers have negated the possibility of intelligent life coming from there. The aliens are now identified as being from Mor-Tax, a planet orbiting a dying sun 40 light years away.

When the series begins, a terrorist group, the People's Liberation Party, accidentally irradiates drums containing hidden aliens while raiding a dump site near Fort Jericho, and the radiation destroys the bacteria that was keeping the aliens unconscious. Now reanimated, the xenomorphs take over the bodies of dead terrorists along with other dead humans. They then confiscate and adapt any available Earth technology that might help appropriate the planet, both by eliminating humanity and creating a permanent vaccination against Earth's deadly bacteria. Their attempt to terra-form our planet into a new home world is on a limited time schedule. In five years, three million colonists from Mor-Tax are scheduled to arrive.

Like other sci-fi/horror series that ran in syndication during the late 1980s (*Friday the 13th: The Series* and *Freddy's Nightmares*), *War of the Worlds* also pushed the limits of "acceptable content" with violence and gore comparable to R-rated horror

movies of the time, especially in the first season, when Mor-Taxans torture and mutilate humans who oppose them by gouging out their eyes with a bizarre third arm that emerges from their chest, plus scenes of dead aliens and host bodies liquefying into grotesque puddles of gut sludge.

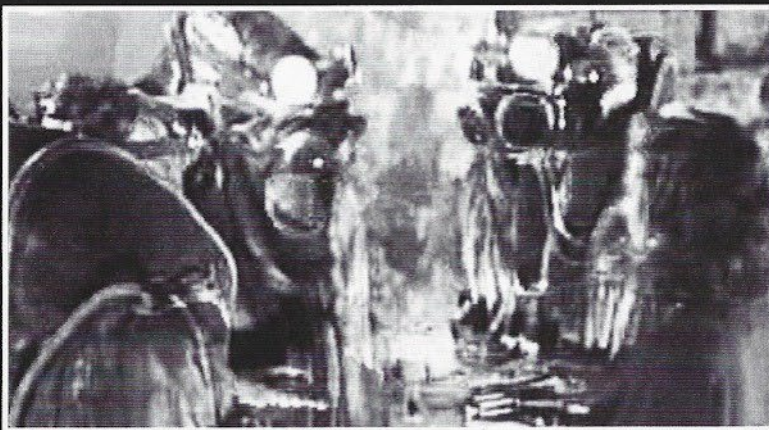
The aliens are led by a triumvirate called the Advocacy, which oversees the Earth invasion while the secretive Council remains on Mor-Tax. Cloaked in what could only be described as diesel-punk, army surplus radiation suits, the Advocacy hide out in Nevada in a cavern that was once used as an underground atom bomb test site.



Newsprint ad announcing the two-hour TV premiere of the show.

Expanding the original film's storyline are a number of new characters. An abstract artist named Quinn, who is actually an alien. Mysteriously immune to Earth's bacteria since the invasion of 1953, he has become a semi-human mutant, who is wanted for testing by his own kind. In addition, another alien race, the Q'arto, have sent a synthetic life form to Earth, intending to kill the Mor-Taxans while saving humanity, but for a dark purpose. Also in the mix is the secret government organization, Project 9, who seem to be more focused on Mor-Taxan technology than the invasion. And the indigenous shaman Joseph Lonetree proves to have power over the aliens. The team even ⇒





*Left, top down: An alien-inhabited biker looks back, and a dead alien begins its meltdown into a puddle of inhuman ooze. Center: A triumvirate of alien Advocates confer with a human-cloned Morthren. Right, top down: More deteriorating, zombie-like Mor-Taxans. An alien arm attacks an ill-fated victim.*

become friends with the remaining Grover's Mill militia of 1938, who had their own very real run-in with the aliens. (The Orson Welles radio broadcast is revealed to have been part of a government disinformation cover-up of the real event. In a welcome nod to one of the most familiar faces from the 1953 film, Ann Robinson reprises her role as Sylvia Van Buren. Now remanded to a mental hospital, she is tormented by constant precognitive visions that reveal alien activity.

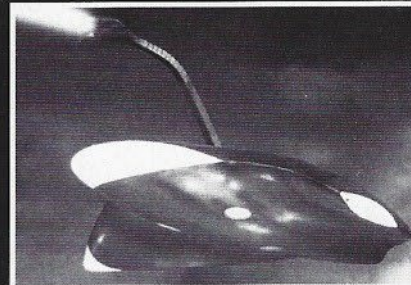
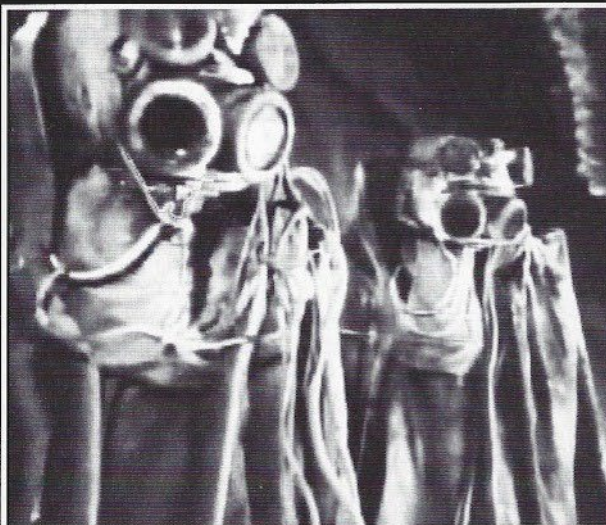
But the most obvious reference to the 1953 movie is the incorporation of the original Martian "manta ray" war machines, which make a grand entrance when Blackwood and Ironhorse are granted access to Hanger 15 where secret UFO artifacts are stored. Reactivated, the ships rise up on their green force field tripod legs and blast their way through the hanger ceiling with their cobra-headed heat ray, then continue blasting from the night skies as they chase the heroes who are running for their lives across the airfield while trying to escape.

With its underlying End of Days theme, all of Season One's episodes had Biblical titles like "Walls of Jericho," "Among the Philistines," "To Heal the Leper," and "Unto Us a Child is Born."

Season Two, however, took a totally different tact. Season One's creative team was replaced, and the show was retooled: the title sequence, the music, much of the black humor, the Biblical references, and also some Season One characters were revamped or removed.

The contemporary setting of Season One was replaced by a desolate, cyberpunk future. The "servant" Mor-Taxins are eliminated by the "upper class" Morthren, due their failure to eradicate humanity. The Morthren have developed a cure for the bacteria and radiation problem by replicating human bodies with cloning machines that create exact duplicates loyal to the Morthren, who are led by the alien Malzor, the scientist Mana, and her assistant Ardix. What remains of the Earth resistance is now based in an underground sewer system.

Consistent with the darker, more militaristic personality of Season Two, Blackwood's character is more sullen, and he now carries a gun. This change in atmosphere was not received as well by Season One fans, and the show was cancelled after only 14 episodes, although 20 were made. Regardless, this quirky and innovative series is well worth a complete viewing.  $\Omega$



*Left, top down: Another Earthman gets grabbed by a mutant third arm. Alien eye on a stalk as unravels as a Mor-Taxan is resurrected. Center: Close-up of two of the Mor-Taxan Advocates. Right, top down: Original 1953 Martian war machine re-purposed for the 1988 series. An revealed Mor-Taxin head.*