

I really believe we're going to make this show kick ass," says the new executive producer of Paramount's syndicated *War of the Worlds*, Frank Mancuso Jr. Recently appointed by Paramount Domestic Television, he has been given virtually a free hand to redesign the program from top to bottom. "They just asked me to do it," he confides. "It took me a while to decide, because of my other show [*Friday the 13th: The Series*], but once I decided to do it, they just said, 'Do what you feel is best for the show.'"

Those changes include the departure from *War of the Worlds* of actors Richard Chaves (who played Lt. Col. Ironhorse, see page 45), and Phil Akin (Norton Drake) as well as the modification of the alien menace.

Mancuso leans back comfortably in an empty dressing room on location near the Toronto waterfront. Dressed in white T-shirt and grey slacks, he looks more like a young crew member than the project's creative head. His manner is equally unassuming. "I didn't really watch the show that much," he discloses. "I do know that the audience was shrinking, but I really don't know the reasons *why* Paramount was dissatisfied with it. From what I saw of it, though, I thought it got a bit static and stiff. There was no prevailing mood, feeling or theme.

"I didn't think the first year of *War of the Worlds* was scary," he continues. "The aliens were not worthy opponents, and that was a fundamental problem. We had beings with these heavy coverings. They would speak and there were these subtitles, which was distancing. They were inept and looked funny. In order to make good drama, the show must have two interesting sides. If it's only black hats and white hats, there's no drama: just go and shoot 'em up."

Nearby, on the set, in a gloomy concrete chamber, Malzor (Denis Forest), head of "The Second Wave" of aliens emerges through a cloud of hissing steam and smoke. He unhesitatingly pronounces a death sentence on the familiar tripartite Advocacy and their foolish followers. Ominously clad executioners lead the failed conquerors out to be zapped into vapor by a huge, spidery, organic machine. Malzor's chief scientist, the starkly beautiful Mana comments, "A high price to pay for failure." Known as the Morthren, fleeing their exploded planet, the new bad guys have arrived.

"The second wave," reveals Mancuso, "are more adept at replicating, so that all the obvious bacteria and radiation burns that the old aliens had are gone. In their human form, they don't deteriorate. They see the incompetency of the Advocacy and have come down in a far superior way. Hopefully, this will give the show a new kind of drive, a new kind of villain.

"These aliens," he explains, "will have more character. They are more like real people. They have faces, they have bodies. They have different points-of-view. They are not like Nazis—they don't all march in a single row. They're diverse, with a common agen-

New Fortunes of

WAR

Malzor (Denis Forest) and Mana (Catherine Disher) are part of a more vicious "Second Wave."

The "War of the Worlds" rages on, but is Earth still a planet worth fighting for?

BY PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

da, which is to act out the words of the Eternal, a god-like presence that guides them. It has no human form. It would be as if we could speak with God. One of the things that separates the aliens and the humans is the idea of faith. They can't understand our religion because we don't see a god, we just believe that He exists; we have faith. It's not based on knowledge, it's based on belief. Malzor speaks to the Eternal, who talks in a kind of elliptical phrasing, like 'Cleanse all impurity.' Then, it's up to Malzor to decide whether that means to purify the air or to take out all the humans. Mana and Malzor will be at odds. They will have different interpretations of the Eternal's words."

The Morthren have a very different technology. "When the aliens come to Earth," elaborates supervising producer Jon (Friday the 13th: The Series) Anderson, "they come in these embryonic pods. They're naked and covered in this green goop. They go into an altering device and come out in human form, much more humanoid than last year and impossible to detect."

In the busy special FX shop, technicians are welding together 10-foot high frames of

PETER BLOCH-HANSEN, *STARLOG's* Canadian Correspondent, profiled Phil Akin in issue #146.

All War of the Worlds Photos: Copyright 1989 Paramount Pictures



Photo: Bruce Macaulay

The Morthren bring with them their equivalent of God, the Eternal, and he commands them, "Cleanse all impurity."

steel wire. These will later be hung from the ceiling, dressed with colored latex and plastic, then carefully lit, becoming alien storage pods for human bodies. Production designer Gavin Mitchell discusses the alien technology taking shape around him: "The Eternal once gave the Morthren a piece of himself. From that, they grew their whole technology. It is powered by energy from the Morthrens' own bodies. We will see Morthren technology growing into situations we know, like in hospitals."

"I was expecting plexiglass and metal," shrugs Catherine Disher, who plays Mana, the chief Morthren scientist. "But what I saw was lots of ectoplasm and goop rolling around. It didn't look elegant and simple, it looked complicated and messy."

"We thought it was boring to watch people push buttons on machines," Mitchell continues. "We've all seen that before. So, we looked in people's garbage and came up with industrial modules of various kinds. These we placed into alien control consoles to provide interesting shadows and shapes behind membranes which people push in to operate." Next, he demonstrates the use of a Morthren ray gun. The eyeball-like thing, is held in the palm for aiming. Its long, tapering tail winds around the arm to the elbow. Interior lights give it the semblance of life. "The Morthren designed it for a three-fingered hand," Mitchell points out, "which makes it a bit awkward for them to use in their human form. They do make mistakes, you see."

However, the principal weapon of the Morthren is their ability to clone humans. "To clone a human," Jon Anderson discloses, "they have to put him in a cloning tank. There are all these horrible chemicals and the person is paralyzed, laying in this chamber with this horrible, organlike thing attached to him, pumping body fluids back and forth. The original must be kept alive in this paralyzed, near-dead state if the clone is to stay alive, so it's quite vicious, the things they're capable of doing. They don't have feelings the way we do—they don't love or

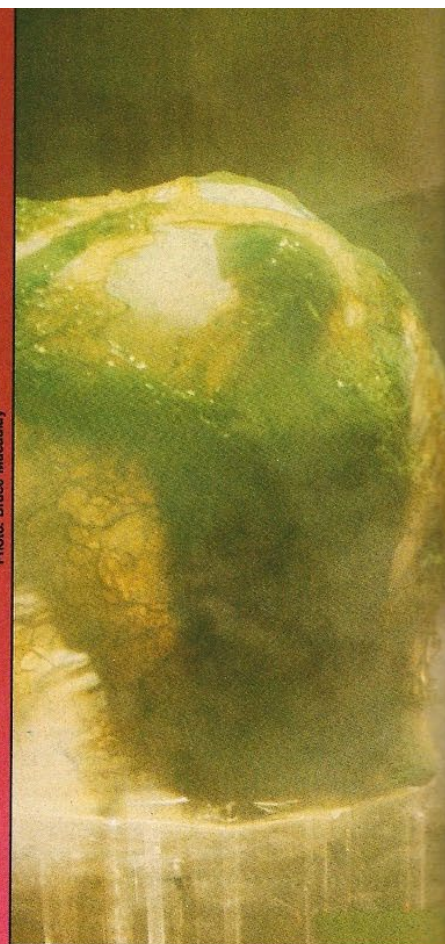
hate. They just further themselves. They don't have numbers, but they're very smart and logical, completely pragmatic.

"The only way they can alter this planet to their own needs is to exploit the weaknesses and confusion of our society, so they can either enslave it or destroy it. Environmentalists are in their way, for example. The aliens would rather the seas were dead. They would prefer that people in high places were causing war, that societies were crumbling. They'll take advantage of anything. They'll exploit motherhood if they can. Drugs are a good thing for them to work on. They'll be the guys setting themselves up as some kind of neo-Nazi group, because they know there are tens of thousands, maybe millions of homeless youth out there who are real putty in their hands. They'll kill anything that gets in their way—adult, child, it doesn't matter."

Alien ruthlessness is only one element in the new, harsher, scarier world the producers are instituting in this *War of the Worlds*. "We don't want to say exactly when this world is," Mancuso says, looking away. "We want it ambiguous, like *RoboCop*, but it's not today. We call it 'almost tomorrow.' The gap between wealth and poverty will be extreme; it's either limousines or walking—nothing in between. The world we'll see will be in a more advanced state of decay."

Anderson elaborates: "We researched by watching all the science-fiction films famous for their grit, like *Blade Runner* and *1984*. What we've come up with is a very dirty, gritty, horrible time. It's more broken; the utilities don't work, the laundromats don't work. We've taken smoke and pollution to the final limit. There's no reason to party in the summer."

Taking up the theme, Gavin Mitchell adds, "It's an alternate world actually envisioned by scientists. We tape Dr. David Suzuki's radio show here in Toronto where he interviews scientists who project a dark future. He talks about major North American cities having upwards of 50



million ecological refugees in 10 years' time, people flooding into the cities, living in shanty towns and on the streets, with a new, underground economy. So, we've envisioned a retrofit world where they've stopped making new vehicles, for example. We see old ones made over into dwellings for people. Old garments are reworked into new ones. The police work as guardians of law and order, *not* to serve and protect. It's a very tough, mean place to live. Our heroes flee here after the destruction of their safe house and after the government abandons them in the first episode. After that, we hope not to see any green again. It's a descent into hell."

Battle Zone

"The primary world of the show is an urban center," explains story editor Jeremy (*Night Heat*) Hole, "and it's like the worst urban center existing today, but even worse. The social structure is breaking down, unravelling, more than it is now. Frank Jr. said at one point that it could be set in the heart of a great many North American cities—but *not* Toronto," he adds with a laugh, "where we've chosen to film. I've heard that part of our equipment is going to be a garbage truck which will go around to locations carrying our own garbage with us."

"Our design concept will be very current. The look of the show will be its own statement. We expect that people will be commenting on how society is breaking down;

Rising from bulbous sacs, the Mothren will assume more substantial humanoid forms than their predecessors.

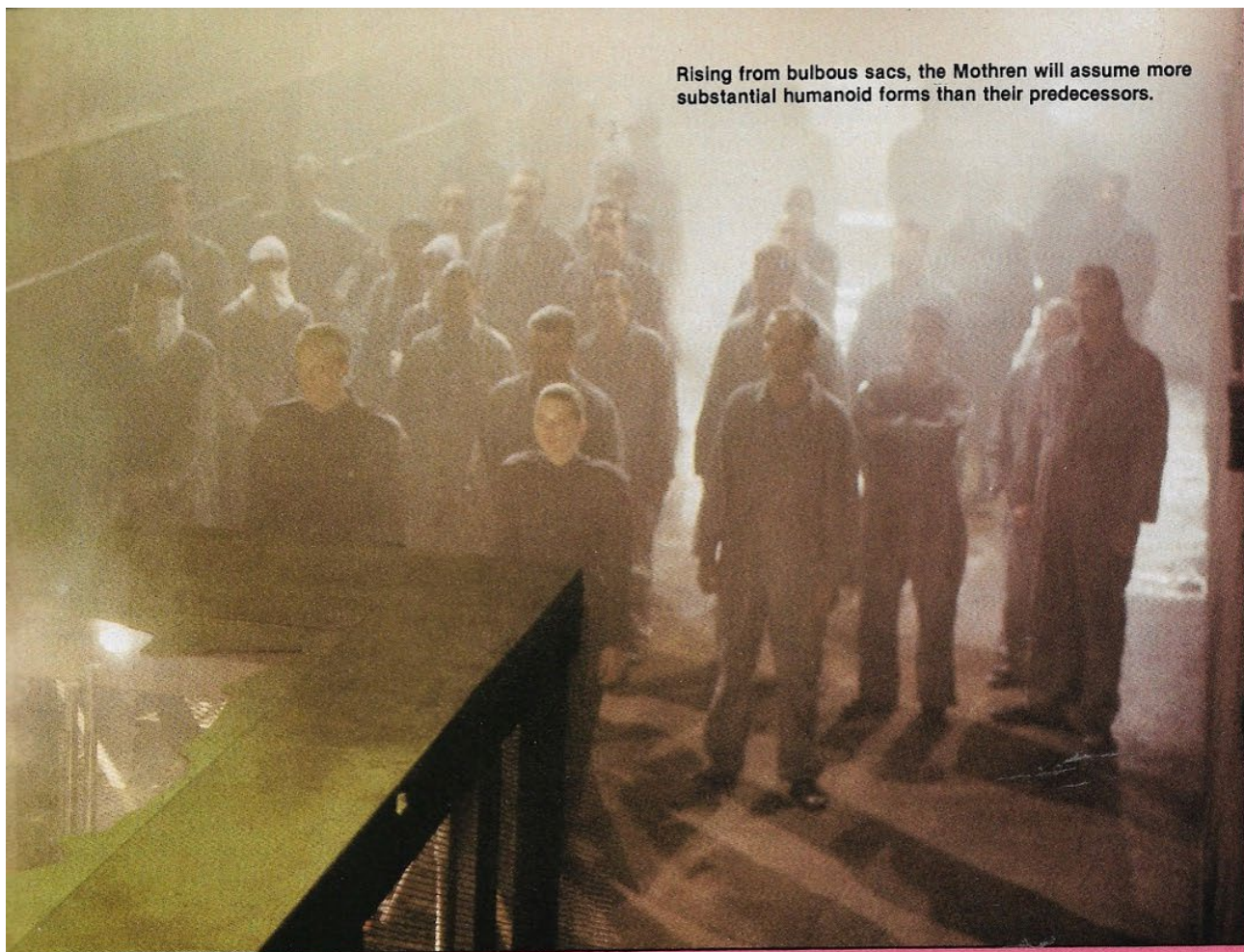


Photo: Bruce Macaulay

just the way the show looks will tell them that. We want the viewer to recognize it as something that may happen in our future unless we address certain problems now."

"We're going to take contemporary issues and blow them way the hell out," asserts Mancuso. "We'll take what exists today and push it as far as we can. Political stuff confuses me. I try to stay away from it as much as possible, but drugs, how we deal with the elderly, Medicare, those are the things that we must deal with in our own lives. We're going to take acid rain and have entire forests that are barren. What we're saying is, 'Do what you can do today so that this doesn't become tomorrow.' It's not going to seem as contemporary as last year's show. It'll seem more like *Brazil*, with origins in the past but with a futuristic sensibility. We'll keep it ambiguous. I think that's more interesting."

In keeping with this intent, Mancuso is planning wherever possible to use a documentary style of filming with hand-held cameras. "I want a newsreel-type feel to it," he explains. "That will make it look much more real and exciting."

"*War of the Worlds* is intended as popular entertainment," asserts Jeremy Hole, who once taught science-fiction courses, "but that doesn't mean that we can't deal with matters of some concern to the audience. So, if our aliens are making some attack that's connected with the environment or pollution, that's part of our

story. We don't treat it frivolously.

"The show is asserting that we *can* make our world better. In this battle, in this future world with all its grimness, there are humans, people who fight to survive and who fight for other people to survive—the person at the Mission who works 24 hours a day to feed people and keep them alive when it's hopeless because there are far too many of them. We've envisioned the Mothren as a warrior race who have colonized other worlds, and now they are here. I want to explore the notion that we must fight the aliens, but we mustn't become them, being brutalized in the process."

"But, Mancuso asks, "what do you do when it seems that there's a positive benefit to something the aliens are doing? Do you stop that because you think you're doing the grander good, or do you let the thing get done and think that it might spread? There are no pat answers and that causes our characters to deepen. They will face moral dilemmas—not all the time certainly, but sometimes. The show will have a moral ambiguity to it that makes it more compelling."

"Science fiction," he observes, "has existed within itself, as something that defines itself. That is kind of distancing for many people. They find it's not real. When science fiction is bad, it seems dismissible, trite, like 'Who cares?' We're going to try to allow this to be science fiction with the notion of contemporary moral dilemma, and see how our characters act within it."

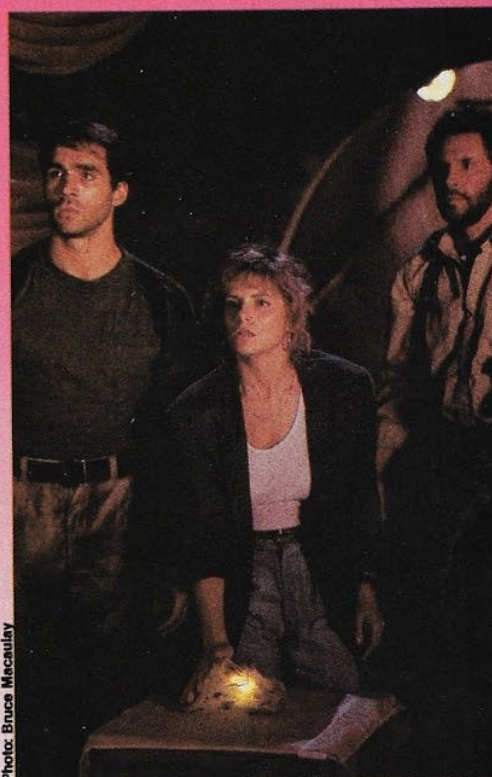
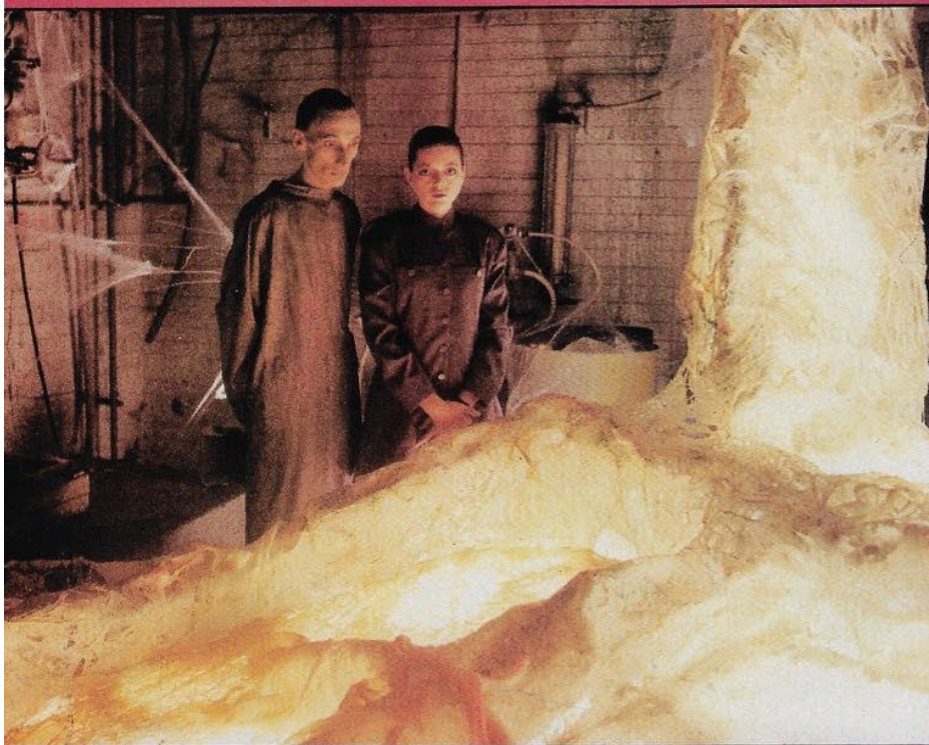
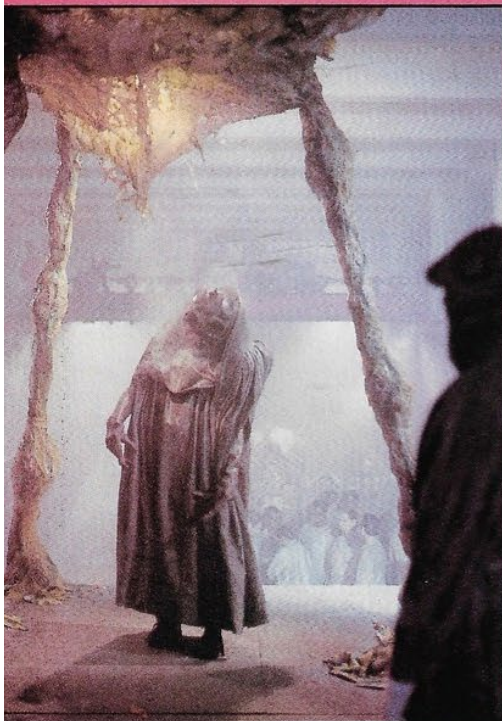


Photo: Bruce Macaulay

With little time to grieve their losses, Blackwood (Jared Martin) and McCullough (Lynda Mason Green) find a new ally in ex-Army officer John Kincaid (Adrian Paul).



Adrix (Jullan Richings) looks upon the Mothren's chief weapon, a device created by Mana (Disher) to clone humans.



The Advocacy pays "a high price" for its failure to subjugate Earth.

The new theme and tone of the show require changes in approach to the character of Harrison Blackwood (played again by Jared Martin, alongside Lynda Mason Green as Suzanne and Rachel Blanchard as Debbie). "Blackwood will evolve in keeping with the new situation," observes Jeremy Hole, "because he'll no longer be a guy in a

laboratory. His safe house is destroyed. He finds himself the leader of almost a fugitive group, who are living hand to mouth, without all the equipment they used to have. They're forced to improvise more. Their huge government funding has dried up, at least temporarily, and they've lost two friends, Ironhorse and Norton Drake. At the beginning of the second episode, Blackwood and Suzanne are in total shock. That episode is about how our people manage to pull together after this disaster, deal with the situation and with their grief, score a victory, and realize that they're not powerless—that they *can* win. But, Harrison will become less assuredly optimistic."

Mounting Casualties

Of course, the most dramatic character change in the series is the elimination of Lt. Colonel Paul Ironhorse, arguably the show's most popular character. Richard Chaves who brought the character to life last year receives several times the fan mail of any of the others, and the studio has already received angry letters of protest from his fans.

"It was a difficult thing," confides Frank Mancuso Jr. "Making changes in an existing family is difficult, but I felt that they had painted the Ironhorse character into such a corner that he had nowhere to go. He was the most active character but they had so riveted him to this militaristic sensibility that he had very little opportunity to be anything other than that. I thought it would be stagnating for him as a character and ultimately stagnating for an audience because he could become predictable. You had on the one side this group of scientists

who were very restricted in their ability to react emotionally because they always had to guard their scientific existence. On the other hand, you had a government-trained guy with a very constricted emotional sensibility because with him, it was always, 'We gotta do this; we gotta do that; we gotta...' I thought it was all very distancing for an audience.

"I know that Ironhorse has many fans, and I felt that Richard did everything he could do with what they gave him. I just don't think they gave him *enough* to do. I didn't think that within the show's context, we were going to be able to make it believable that he could lose all that staunchness they had saddled him with.

"Richard naturally wanted to know why he was cut. I subsequently talked with him and he had many of the same feelings I had. He had wanted to get into his Indian heritage all along. That wasn't allowed to develop last year, and you can't just say, 'Oh, now he's a different guy,' so I did what I thought was right. I may end up being very wrong."

Ironhorse will be replaced by a new character called John Kincaid, played by 30-year-old Adrian (*The Colbys*) Paul. Kincaid is a renegade, an ex-Army officer still occasionally used for covert commando missions. He lives in a complex, nuclear blast-proof shelter under the city. Abandoned for years, it has been fitted out by Kincaid as a command center and bolt-hole. Kincaid is planned as aggressive, resourceful, uncontrollable, the unpredictable man of action, an irritant and foil for Harrison Blackwood.

Norton Drake (the character played by Phil Akin), according to Mancuso, was dropped for different reasons. "I felt the computers took the audience out of the drama," he explains. "So, because we won't have much of the computer stuff we had last year, and because the safe house will be gone, it became very difficult: 'What do we do with this guy in his wheelchair and vans?' The character's physical limitations were too difficult to work with. Besides, last year, it was always, 'OK, let's sit in this antiseptic place and talk about stuff for 10 minutes and then let Ironhorse go off and shoot 'em up.' It was always, this guy does this, and this guy sits at the computer and talks about what he knows, and this guy talks about what he knows. You almost knew what they were going to say before they said it. That's where the moral ambivalence of the new show will really come to light. We want the audience waiting in anticipation of what the characters will do. We want them to say, 'What would I do in that situation?'"

So, what is the new *War of the Worlds* really about? Jon Anderson offers the most succinct answer: "The idea is driven through all the shows that human love, human compassion is the one strong thing we have going for ourselves as a race. In one scene, an alien says, 'You people would give your lives to save one child: That's why we'll win.' Then, Harrison says, 'No, that's why you'll lose.'" ❖

Photo: Ben Mark Hobbins

Photo: Bruce Macaulay