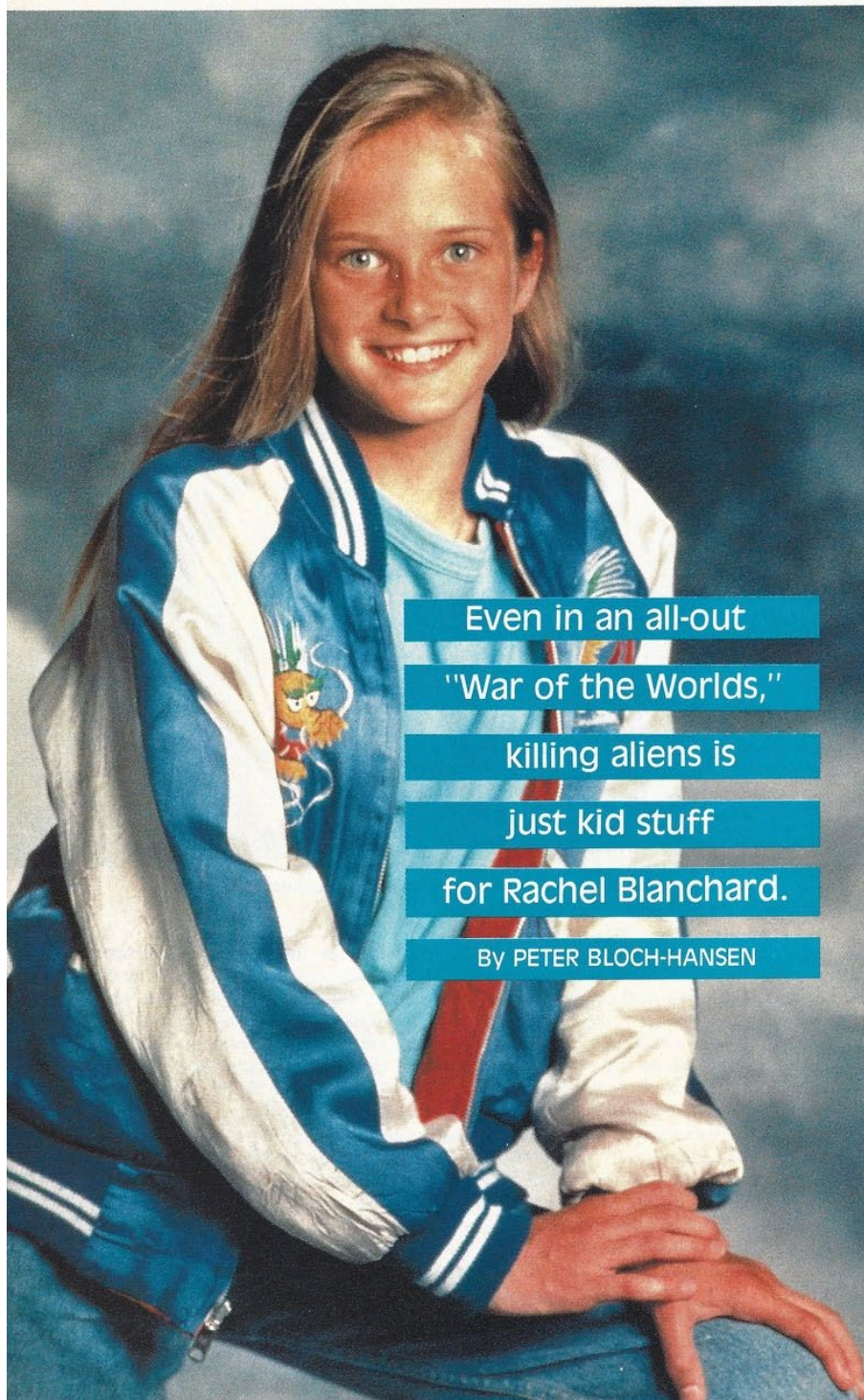


Rachel, Get Your



Even in an all-out
"War of the Worlds,"
killing aliens is
just kid stuff
for Rachel Blanchard.

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

"I'm, like, growing up in a sewer," says 13-year-old Rachel Blanchard, speaking as Debbie McCullough, her on-screen *War of the Worlds* alter-ego. She refers, of course, to the watery underground shelter used by the Blackwood team as headquarters in their on-going battle with Earth's most well-dressed extra-terrestrial foes, the Morthren.

"Being on TV is fun," says Blanchard. "Sometimes it's weird, but mostly it's fun. I have a really neat trailer. It has a TV, a VCR and a radio, so I don't get bored on location. When we're inside, I bring my little TV into my dressing room. But what I like most is the other people. On one of my first days, I came in to read a script, and I was wearing shorts and I felt this water on my leg. Bob Wetheimer [Executive in Charge of Production] was hiding. I turn around and he laughed. He always squirts me with a water gun. He comes up and goes, 'Hi, Rachel,' squirt, squirt. So, I have this *really* good water gun that shoots farther than his, and when he came back, I shot him with it.

"Adrian Paul and Jared Martin are crazy. They're always teasing me, especially Adrian. I will chew a piece of gum and Adrian will go, 'You'll get air in your blood, you know,' or I'll be eating a chocolate bar and it's, 'Oh, you're going to get fat when you're older, Rachel.' He teases me about everything I eat."

Every actor finds ways to pass the time while waiting for the next shot. "I talk," says Blanchard blithely. "Sometimes I bring games and stuff, but usually, there are no other kids on set. Sometimes I'll play sports with people. Lynda Mason Green and I will play frisbee, and there is baseball at dinner.

"Many fun things happen on set. People make funny faces, the grips and stuff. We have bets about who's going to get wrapped first, or by what time. They play tricks on each other, and there are many jokes. Some of them are dirty. Adrian, Jared and Lynda say many things they don't think I know about, but I understand *everything*."

The young girl blushes. "The directors swear, the producers swear, everybody swears and they go, 'Oh, sorry, Rachel, sorry.' That's pretty weird. I guess there's lots to swear at. I'm pretty used to it. Bonnie, Lynda's stand-in, wears this wig. It makes her look like a streetwalker, so everybody calls her Trixie. And all the crew, they see my mum and they all go, 'Hi, Mum.' "

Gun

And when they're not kidding around with her, Blanchard receives coaching on her acting from the older cast members. "Adrian and Harrison—Jared, I mean; I always call him Harrison—they help me the most." Blanchard pauses to consider. "The way they do things helps me. They tell me, 'Say it angrily,' or, 'Say it sad.' They told me one thing that really helped me. They told me to say a line opposite to the way you would when you first read it. Like, when it seems you would say something sad, you say it happy. Sometimes that doesn't work at all, but most of the time, it does."

Forever Young

When the show's format was changed, Blanchard lost a friend in Richard Chaves. "That was sad," she says, "because he was really, really nice to me. He almost taught me to juggle. I can do two balls now. I sent him a blown-up picture for Christmas of

him teaching me how to juggle.

"The others used to tease Richard about clearing his throat. Last year, before saying their lines, Jared would sing and Richard would go, 'Uh, uh, uh.' " She makes deep throat-clearing noises, then laughs, blushing. "I can't do it right. Then, he

would go, 'Hooaw.' " A very loud, throaty noise. More laughter. "He didn't talk to me too much about leaving the show, but I think he was upset. The last few days, he was pretty quiet. But I wish he was still here. He was really nice.

"I didn't know Phil Akin that well. He also started teaching me to juggle, but he wasn't a very good juggling teacher. He was funny."

About the new format itself, Blanchard is unequivocal. "It's much better. It's more interesting. The special FX are really great and *War of the Worlds* is more adventurous and suspenseful now. Just everything is better, the scenery, even the costumes. Honestly, I really don't like the science-fiction part of the show that much. I like the *adventure* part. I mean, I like science fiction, but I couldn't sit and watch a million *Doctor Whos*.

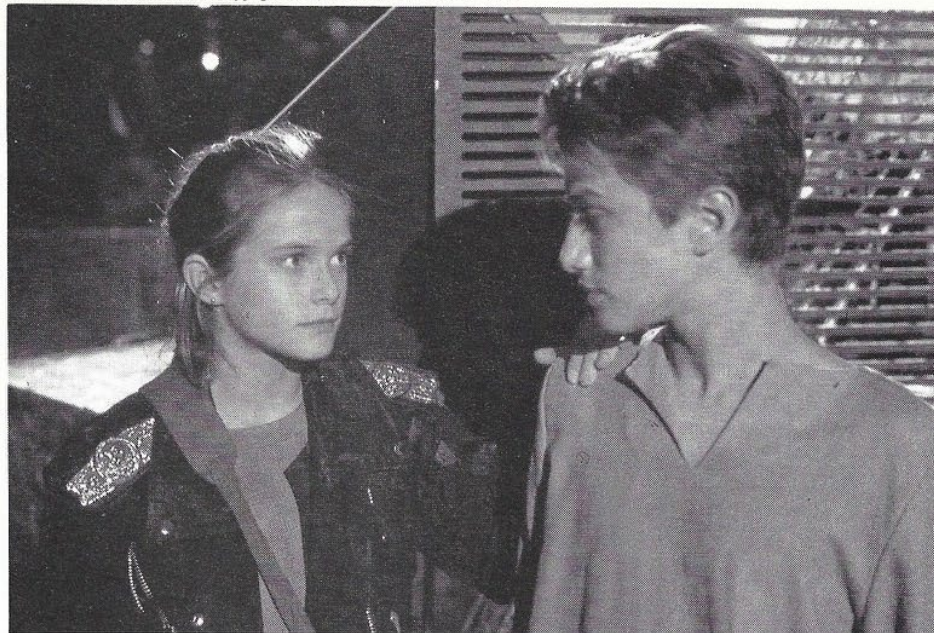
"My role as Debbie is bigger this year, and I'm not just tagging along like before. I know what's going on because Suzanne tells me. It's different too because we're not always in the same place all the time. Last year, most of my scenes were in the lab. I'm a lookout now. I get to do more things, like run away and pull guns. I like that, but I can't do it very well."

The actress confesses, there was one day's shoot where she "had to jump up, tear this gun out of my bag and say, 'Freeze or I'll shoot you.' I had to do it so quickly and remember so many things that I always forgot the gun or I kept dropping it. Once, I had it pointed at *myself*, saying, 'Freeze or I'll shoot you.' They kept rolling and didn't say 'Cut,' and they all kept trying not to laugh. I was supposed to be mad and I kept

PETER BLOCH-HANSEN, *STARLOG's* Canadian Correspondent, profiled Catherine Disher in issue #153.

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All War of the Worlds Photos: Copyright 1989, 1990 Paramount Pictures TV

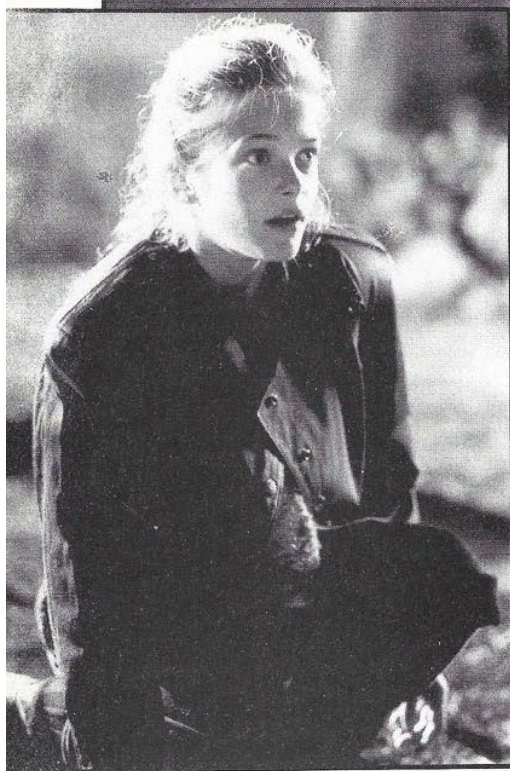
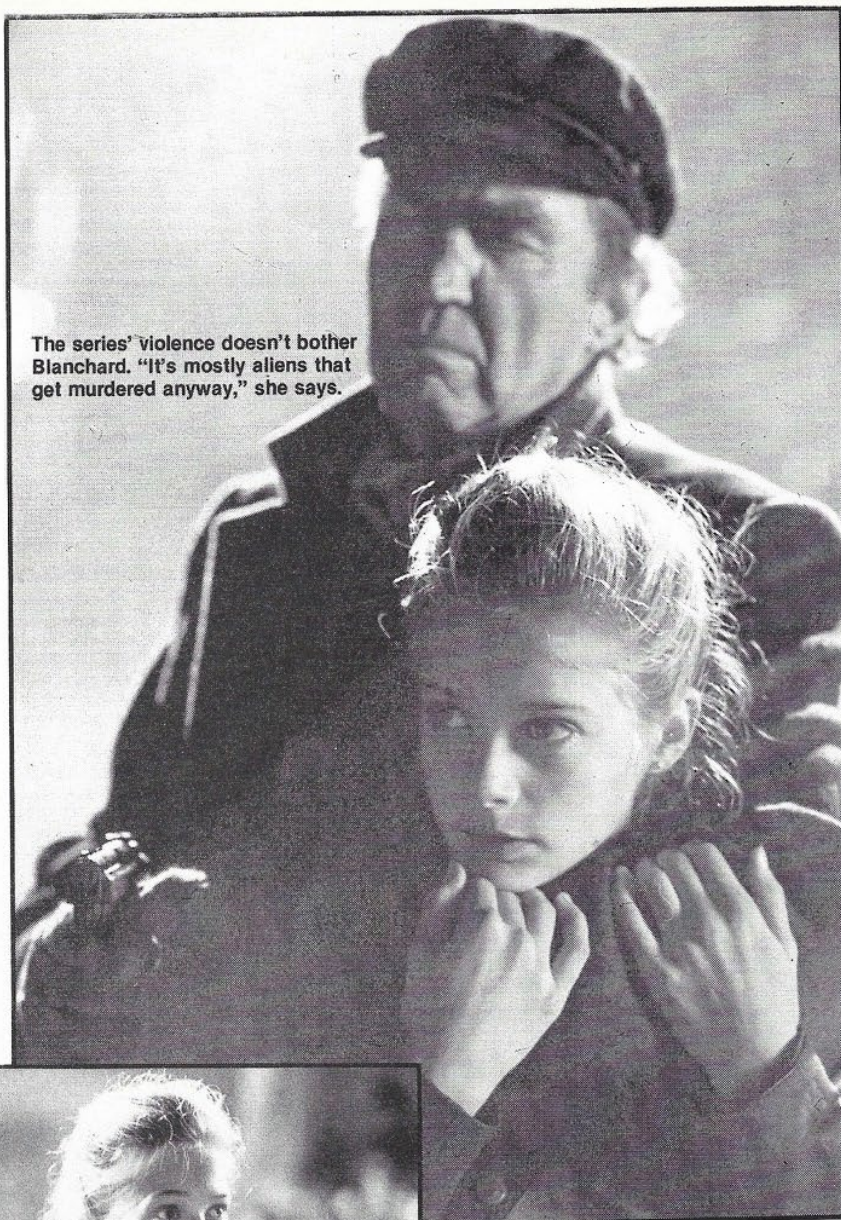


In "Loving the Alien," Debbie (Blanchard) befriended Ceeto (Keram M. Sanchez). "I ran away with him and then discovered he was a Morthren."

Blanchard enjoys working—and joking—with fellow cast members Jared Martin, Lynda Mason Green and Adrian Paul.



The series' violence doesn't bother Blanchard. "It's mostly aliens that get murdered anyway," she says.



"I get to do more things this season," Blanchard notes, "like pull guns."

laughing. My hands are too small for the guns. Adrian is good with them, though. He taught me this one ninja move, if I can remember it." Blanchard gets up and demonstrates a ferocious martial arts kick. "I didn't get to do it, though," she adds wistfully.

In one on-screen fight, Blanchard flattened a young male opponent. "That was fun," she enthuses. "He had padding on, and I tried not to, but I kept kicking him in this one spot where he didn't have padding. My foot just went that way, sort of."

Young At Heart

Being a child star is not without its career stresses. "I miss a lot of school," Blanchard admits, "but I get tutored and I catch up. It's not that hard. Well, sometimes it is. I'm allowed to work 13 hours a day by law. Usually, I work from three to five days a

week. Sometimes you have to come back for second unit or something, and there is looping on Saturdays. We usually shoot at night. I work from 4:00 p.m. till 6:00 a.m. and then sleep till 2:00 p.m. Then, I get up, eat and have to work again.

"I take my homework on set, but at 2:00 a.m., I just go, 'Oh, no,' and relax. I'm too tired for homework then. Sometimes, I'm tired and grouchy. I can't really go outside and I don't feel like working. It throws me all out of whack. When I stop filming on a weekend, I can't go to bed till about 1:00 a.m. Or if I have school the next day, I fall asleep in classes."

However, she notes, "I don't really mind working in the summer when the other kids are out of school. On weekends, I go out, go swimming, do other stuff, and during the week, I have time off. It's fun."

Rachel Blanchard is a TV veteran, with five years of commercials to her credit, as well as appearances on *The Littlest Hobo*, *Kids of DeGrassi* and a Canadian TV movie, *Glory Enough for All*. Her actress' lifestyle doesn't create problems among her friends, though. "Another girl in school used to do commercials and this other girl does some film, so they're used to it. They don't think much about it."

The story of how she got the role of Debbie is a particularly revealing one. "I just auditioned," Blanchard states, "and then there were recalls and recalls. The reason I got it in the end was because of something I did on the last episode of *The Littlest Hobo*. There is a sort of cliff on Lake Ontario that is pretty high that my character was to go off. They had this metal thing that pulls you back, but the stunt girl who was supposed to do it looked at it and said she *wouldn't* do it. They asked me and I thought it was fun. So, I got Debbie because of that. I love doing dares."

Despite her obvious enthusiasm, Blanchard must confess that her present job isn't always fun. "They want me to talk with an American accent now," she discloses. "I say, 'mum.' They want me to say, 'm-o-m,' and 'st-o-p.' When I say a line with this 'ah,' I feel so stupid. There's a list of words I have to say American, like 'about.' I say, 'bin. I've bin to the doctor.' I have to say, 'been.' I say, 'crick,' instead of, 'creek.' It's really confusing. It's just that you're concentrating on other things. It throws you off. I don't think most Americans notice."

Exposed to the violence for which *War of the Worlds* has been criticized in some quarters, the young actress is unmoved. "It is a violent show, but it's not like seeing someone blow someone's head off," she points out, "and it's mostly aliens that get murdered anyway."

People associated with *War of the Worlds* have commented on Rachel Blanchard's professionalism and the pleasure she takes in her work. This 13-year-old has her own ideas about job satisfaction, however. "I like riding a horse. I had to do that once. I like it when they have ice cream. Yelling at the top of your lungs is also fun," she says, grinning. "I like the screaming." ★