

All Greg Strangis and Herbert Wright need are a few go

WAR OF THE



By MARC SHAPIRO

Remember when aliens were not cuddly, did not call home and were downright evil? The creative minds behind the new syndicated TV series *War of the Worlds* do.

"We're working *against* the idea that all intelligent life in the universe is like E.T.," chuckles executive producer Greg Strangis. "Our aliens will definitely *not* be pleasant."

Pleasant is also not a way to describe the often time-consuming process of pulling

together this Paramount Television updating of H.G. Wells' classic science-fiction tale. Strangis and creative consultant Herbert Wright (who recently crossed the compound from the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* team) are going through the mind-numbing process of casting *War of the Worlds*' four recurring roles (no casting decisions at presstime). They're fielding bids for what will be a steady optical special FX gig and collectively bemoan the fact that "we were definitely not ready for the writers' strike."

But behind-the-scenes chaos aside, both

Strangis (whose father Sam is also involved at the executive level) and Wright agree that their weekly dose of alien invasion, set to debut in October, wouldn't necessarily displease H.G. Wells.

"I don't think we've taken too much in the way of artistic license with Wells' basic story," says Wright. "I believe what Wells originally intended was a real social commentary as well as a science-fiction story. The series will continue in that vein."

"However, in the book and the movie, the invaders were Martians. What we've done is take away the Martian angle and

men to carry out TV's

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made Mars merely a staging area for an unknown race from another planet. So, they're *not* actually from Mars. But that element aside, I believe we're being very true to H.G. Wells' story."

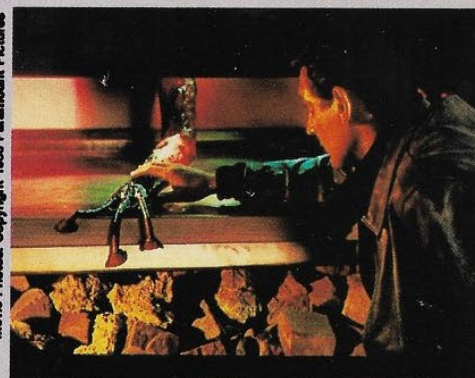
War of the Worlds: The Series takes up 35 years after the climactic scenes of the classic 1953 George Pal-Byron Haskin movie which starred Gene Barry, Ann Robinson and Les Tremayne (STARLOG #132). It seems that the aliens didn't actually die from exposure to bacteria in our atmosphere but, in fact, went into a state of hibernation. After accidental exposure to

nuclear radiation, the creatures awaken from their sleep and take up the battle where they left off.

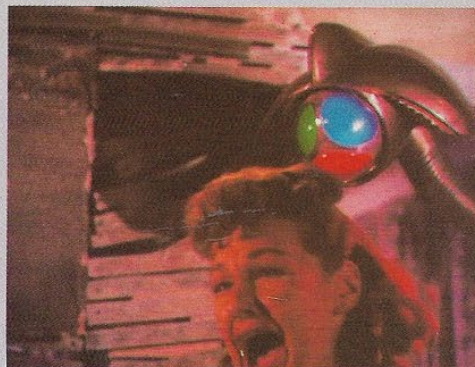
"Which is to ready the Earth for colonization," reveals Strangis. "We learn that there are shiploads of aliens, several years out, on their way to Earth to take over."

But like the book and the movie, Earthlings in *War of the Worlds: The Series* aren't about to roll over and wave the white flag. Carrying the standard for the good guys is a group of four freedom fighters who will do battle with the aliens in what Wright describes as a "Vietnam-style conflict."

Movie Photos Copyright 1983 Paramount Pictures



Thirty-five years ago, Dr. Clayton Forrester (Gene Barry) pronounced the Martians dead, but even brilliant scientists make mistakes.



Running into marauding Martians would drive anyone crazy, which may be why Sylvia Van Buren (Ann Robinson) will be fighting the new *War of the Worlds* from an insane asylum.

Our heroes include: Dr. Harrison Blackwood, an astrophysicist and the adopted son of the movie's Gene Barry character; Susanne McCullough, a microbiologist; Norton Drake, a Jamaican, wheelchair-bound radio astronomer; and Colonel Paul Ironhorse, the group's liaison with the military. Also on hand in various episodes is actress Ann Robinson, reprising her film role as Sylvia Van Buren, now confined to a mental hospital, but available for informative "consults" when the heroes need her.

Enter, The Enemy

The series, to be filmed in Canada, will log a two-hour premiere and 22 one-hour episodes during its first season on the syndication trail. Securing better than 100 markets out of the box was a pleasant surprise. Delivering the goods in a believable fashion is shaping up as an undertaking.

"I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that we're facing all sorts of problems," explains a candid Strangis, "and the biggest problem has been making the war in-

MARC SHAPIRO, veteran STARLOG correspondent, profiled Jeffrey Jones in issue #132.



"When one of these creatures is killed," reveals visual FX man Bill Sturgeon, warriors and noncombatants alike can expect to see "a certain amount of melting and decomposition."



FX crewman Barney Burman labors to keep the Martians looking as hand-some as ever.

teresting to viewers. In the book and the movie, the aliens were such an advanced race that the Earthlings were no match for them. We had to think of ways to make our heroes heroic and our bad guys vulnerable."

And the logical place to start, says Wright, was by limiting the alien's hardware.

"It was a one-way street in the movie and that wouldn't make much of a series. In the first episode, the aliens would fly over in

their battleship, fire one shot and everybody would switch over to another channel," laughs Wright. "What we've done is take away the weaponry they had in the movie and force them to create weapons out of what they find on Earth. We reintroduce the alien fighting ship in the first episode and promptly put it to rest."

"The aliens must also stay in areas which have high radiation, which will make them easier for the good guys to find. We've basically transformed them from unstoppable beings to outer-space terrorists which will make *War of the Worlds* a more equal fight."

But don't get the idea that Strangis and Wright have neutered the black hats for ratings' sake.

The *War of the Worlds* monsters have been empowered with the ability to take over human bodies through something that Strangis describes as "a kind of osmosis."

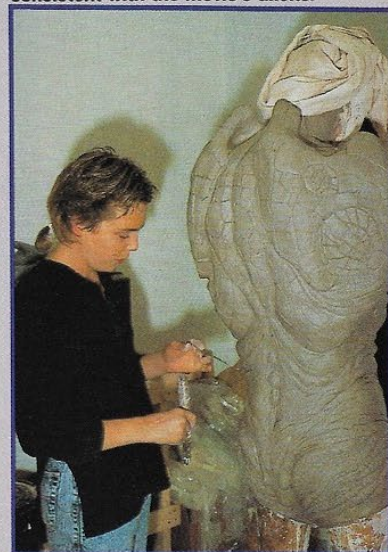
"It won't be a perfect takeover. After a while, the human body will take on a zombie look and ultimately will be discarded. It gives the aliens a bit of an edge and it helps us keep what these creatures really look like a secret."

If the *War of the Worlds: The Series* people are keeping true to their sources, what the creatures will look like is no big secret. The spindly, three-fingered, one-eyed nasty glimpsed briefly in the movie is the alien. Right?

"The general design has remained somewhat consistent with the movie's aliens," explains Strangis. "The three-fingered hand is there. But you've got to remember that these things, at some point during their hibernation, came in contact with nuclear radiation. And, to make a long story short, they didn't store too well."

"We only plan on showing bits and pieces of the aliens. We don't plan on ever showing an alien full-on. We don't want to lose the

Sculptor Brent Baker backs up the Martians, using a design that, according to Greg Strangis, is only "somewhat consistent with the movie's aliens."



War of the Worlds TV Photos: Copyright 1988 Paramount Pictures TV

mystery of our monster. But they are definitely more horrifying. We haven't skimped on their lack of beauty."

Heading up the beauty parlor is the lone FX body hired to date, visual effects honcho Bill Sturgeon. Sturgeon, fresh off a stint on the updating of *The Blob*, is presently doing double duty, designing both the alien (whose look, he claims is still in the formative stages) and the zombified results of the alien takeover of humans.

"Doing the zombie makeup has been a particular kick. It's not just the typical rotting flesh sort of thing that everybody has seen a million times. When an alien has been in a human body for a while, parts of its features begin coming through the human body, which has allowed me to do more subtle things."

"With the aliens, I've basically sculpted an entire suit. I'm in the process of taking molds of the arms and legs. Once a final design has been decided on, I'll be piecing individual parts together."

Sturgeon, who is just now adjusting to the idea of not having to look for work for at least a year, discloses that the closest thing to horror FX on *War of the Worlds* will involve what happens when the outer-space types die.

"When one of these creatures is killed, it will revert to its most basic molecular form, which, on this show, will consist of a certain amount of melting and decomposition."

Strangis, however, is quick to point out that *War of the Worlds*' syndication, rather than network, route doesn't pave the way for an abundance of grisly effects.

"I don't want this characterized as a blood and gore show," he insists. "Even the term 'graphic' is a dangerous word. The show will have effects, but it is also a series that my 12-year-old must be able to watch. This series will have a tendency to be emo-

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Dotrice

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said they liked the idea, but I got the feeling they weren't too sincere when they said, 'It's a good idea and we'll use it the week after Vincent has plastic surgery and the week before the wedding,' " he laughs.

But Dotrice is quick to point out that no premise has been entirely dismissed, and with good reason.

"This show is *not* dealing with reality. Oh, we get a sense of realism when the show goes up top and into the D.A.'s office, but what we have is a hardline *fantasy*. In that sense, there are no parameters. *Beauty and the Beast* is an ideal project for me.

"I love fantasy. I wouldn't want to be in something like *The Equalizer* and constantly have to address the awful reality of New York. I love the fable-like quality of this show to the extent that I cringe when somebody is killed."

Dotrice, with the first season's final episodes nearly completed, has become accustomed to his 12-14 hour days and spending much of them face to makeup with the mask that hides the real Ron Perlman.

"That's the only way I see him these days," says Roy Dotrice. "It's a tremendous shock when I see him *without* the makeup. And it's just as well that I've grown to accept Ron as Vincent—

"Because I've always been afraid of lions."

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handling it rather responsibly. There are times that the old stick-and-club psyche comes out, but at least we have begun to understand as a species that it's bad manners, it's not the best way to do business. If you have a power, say, electricity, you use it to construct weapons or you use it to power toasters.

Genetic engineering is the same thing. There are many, many problems that people live with that they wouldn't have to have in a society with genetic engineering. For example, you could say, "Well, there is a genetic component in this particular disorder," and a genetic surgeon, as it were, could step in and give somebody a healthy baby instead of one with a severe problem. This is the type of thing I'm talking about. **STARLOG:** Do you think religion is diametrically opposed to science?

CHERRYH: No. Religion, properly, should be a study of the universe.

STARLOG: Don't you believe that we'll see growing controversy over genetic engineering from organized religion?

CHERRYH: There is always controversy between people who are activists attempting to understand a new system. There were people who ran around at the first installation of factories, the Luddites. They ran about destroying factories because they figured it was going to destroy humanity to have factories. When you first had certain kinds of technology, especially those that have a component of moral choice, there are people who grow totally alarmed. The world is full of people who either believe a glass is half full, or half empty.

STARLOG: So, you would disagree with those who don't have faith in human beings to make those kinds of decisions and believe in placing their faith in God?

CHERRYH: If I had to get philosophical for a moment, I would say that if they believe in the omnipotence and the control of the Creator, perhaps they should have a little more faith that the system works. It doesn't need their personally advising the Creator in which is the best way to construct His universe. Science is something that we do. We have been a tool-using species from our earliest history, and science is a tool like any other tool. The best place for religion in something like this is to make moral choices. To my mind, anyone who would say that the creation of a child is evil has got a screw loose. What's the matter with producing a healthy baby? A religion that would condemn a child to a life of pain and discomfort instead of fixing what is the matter with them before birth has got its eyes on the wrong problem. They are looking at the "Rule Book," and no matter what religion you belong to, when you get bogged down in procedural rules instead of looking at the abstract matters of concern for other living beings, then you've got a moral problem, not a problem with genetic engineering.

TO BE CONTINUED

War

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tionally violent. We *will* be dealing with action and violent death. But that doesn't mean we're going to have blood and guts all over the screen.

"Alfred Hitchcock's cutting away in *Psycho* is much more effective than Freddy Krueger terrorizing a bunch of kids on Elm Street. Special FX are an important part of this series, but it's the stories and the characters that will keep viewers coming back."

At Last, Victory?

And it's the stories and the characters that, hopefully, will keep *War of the Worlds* from suffering the fate of two similar TV invasion series, "*V*" and *The Invaders*. While pointing to both shows as "well-produced and well-thought-out efforts," Strangis feels *War of the Worlds* has the horses for the good long ride that "*V*" and *The Invaders* missed.

"Our alien seizure of Earth won't be as overt as the one in '*V*.' Only a few characters in our show are aware that it is happening. '*V*' essentially re-created the occupation of Europe, while our series will have more of a jungle warfare feel to it.

"And unlike '*V*,' you won't have alien and Earth defectors changing sides. Both sides in this show are totally committed to an all-out victory."

Wright jumps into the conversation with another point in favor of the pair's war-ravaged series.

"We would like our audience to believe our heroes are in real jeopardy and so, if the series warrants it, there would be no problem with killing off a regular character. We're definitely interested in putting a realistic series on the air. The good guys will *not* win every battle. Neither will the aliens.

"But don't get the idea that the whole series is going to be a one-dimensional downer," continues Wright. "We're making a concerted effort to inject liberal doses of dark comedy into the scripts. I'm fond of the type of humor in the movies *Critters* and *The Hidden* and I would like to see those kinds of elements around to break things up a bit."

Strangis and Wright apologize for the vagueness that seems to couch most of their comments. "It's just too early in the game for many of the details," explains Strangis.

But Wright isn't above doing a bit of speculating about a best-case scenario in which *War of the Worlds* has a good long run and the show's creative minds must decide how to end the series.

"We first thought that the show would end in a stalemate and the aliens would return to their world and leave Earth to its own devices. Then, we had the idea of the Earthlings defeating the aliens. But, if the political and social climate in the world could handle it, I would like to go with my personal favorite—

"Which would be to let the aliens win."