

# Lynda Mason Green

By PETER BLOCH-HANSEN

**A** science-fiction heroine who doesn't shoot a gun, even one, or strip to her underwear, ever, or fall down at tense moments and have to be rescued? Can it be true? For leading lady Lynda Mason Green it is, but even she admits that defining her character on *War of the Worlds*, Dr. Suzanne McCullough, has been tricky.

McCullough is a single mother. She's a working woman—a scientist, in fact—and spends her days saving the world. However, as Mason Green points out, the action/adventure-oriented *War of the Worlds* isn't about how Suzanne McCullough juggles the demands of career and home life.

"It's difficult to bring the daughter in when, essentially, the daughter is *not* supposed to know about the aliens. There is an episode when she is under attack, but I'm not sure that she knows that it's from aliens. So, there isn't an awful lot of time devoted to what it means to be a single mother. But Suzanne is protecting the world for her daughter's future."

Considering the show's much-touted social relevance, Mason Green adds, "I'm speaking mostly in terms of the logistics of developing that particular relationship. It was important to make sure that the audience knew that Debbie was taken care of. She can't come out during the battle. A large part of our energy would be spent protecting her—specifically, a large part of *my* priority would be to keep her out of harm's way. Otherwise, it would seem to imply that if they're working, single mothers don't pay any attention to their children, which isn't the case."

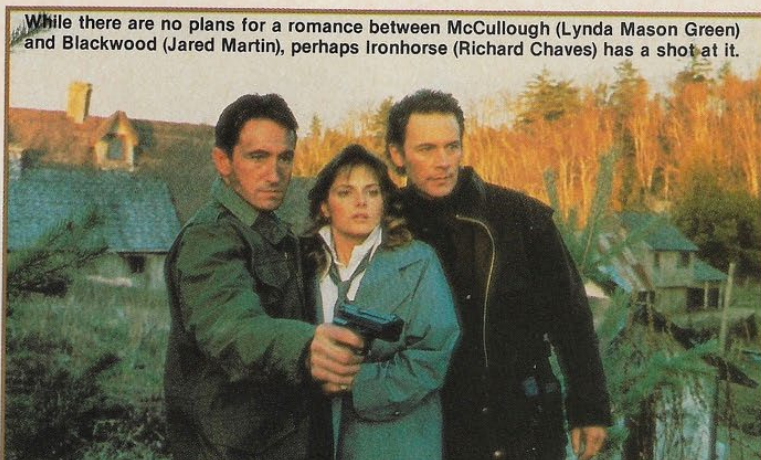
Another troublesome area is romance. There's always a question about whether a series with strong male and female leads can sustain itself without the two characters falling in love, a la *Moonlighting*.

"It's a can of worms," Mason Green comments. "We considered that at the beginning, and that *was* part of the original concept. But then we thought, well, *Moonlighting* was supposed to be about a detective agency with these two interesting people at its head. You either make a show about a detective agency, or you make it about the relationship."

"The main reason for doing this series is to develop the action, the drama of the conflict between two species. If something else happens along the way, well, God knows it's possible, but it would have to be resolved somehow. What it means and how they deal

## Menace to Martians

Single motherhood, says the actress, waits for no alien.



While there are no plans for a romance between McCullough (Lynda Mason Green) and Blackwood (Jared Martin), perhaps Ironhorse (Richard Chaves) has a shot at it.

Photo: Michael Courtney



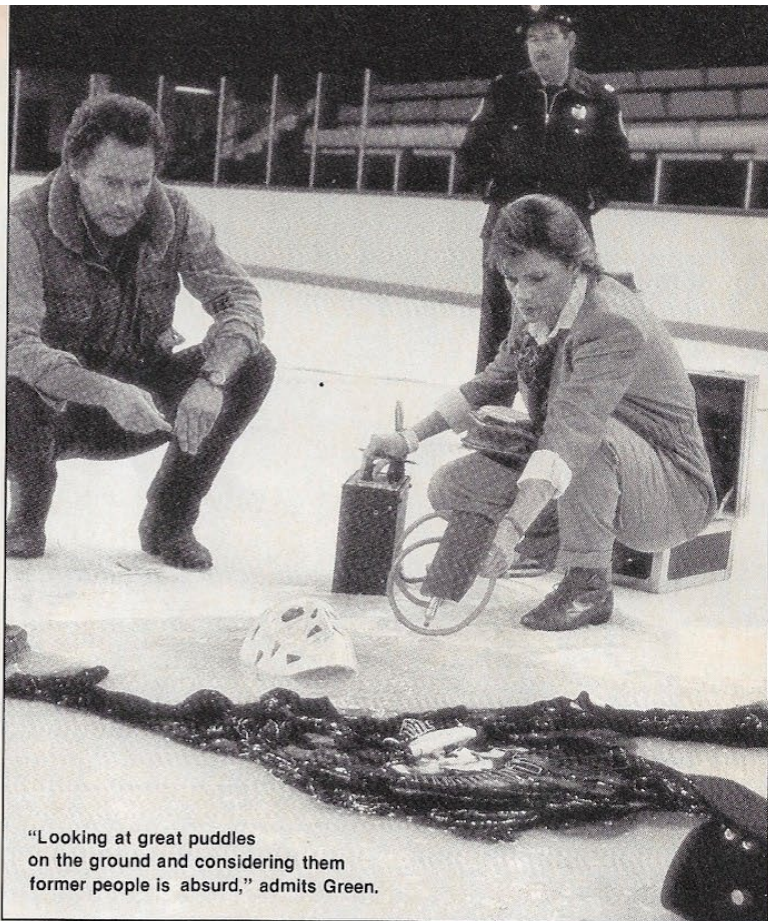
with it, and the tension it creates is very complex and it must be very carefully considered."

If not a romance with Harrison Blackwood (Jared Martin), then with someone else, a new character? "That's an interesting possibility," muses Mason Green. "It may very well get developed. There's an episode in which my ex-husband shows up again. That may turn into a moral dilemma. If someone new gets involved in Suzanne's life, then the dilemma will be, would he become part of the team? Would he be interested? Could he cope with Suzanne's unavailability due to her involvement in this alien project? It pretty much as to be resolved in the course of several episodes. I have a feeling that any time any of us get involved with someone, it's going to be like the women on *Bonanza*. They all *die* within one episode, or something happens and they go away. The men on the *Ponderosa* were cursed."

### Serious Scientist

Suzanne McCullough is not quite the character Mason Green originally envisioned. "I had some ideas about who Suzanne was early on, what the single mother thing meant, and what her profession meant to her," the actress explains. "The logistics of actually doing the series have meant that some aspects of Suzanne have gone on the back burner and others have been more developed. For example, it's hard to keep a microbiologist in the show's action, to justify her always running out with her microscope. It started to become very awkward and cumbersome, so we decided that Suzanne has a background in psychology and behavioral patterns as well and might be interested in that research."

Nevertheless, Mason Green feels that the character hasn't actually changed all that



"Looking at great puddles on the ground and considering them former people is absurd," admits Green.

much. "It is more a matter of expanding than changing," she insists. "Her priorities have always been her child and her career. I think she's a really interesting, dedicated person with a great deal of integrity. I really like her a lot. I'm very pleased with the way things are going."

Mason Green is quick to point out however, that Suzanne isn't without her foibles. "It's a very fine line," she says cautiously. "When you're developing a character, you must allow for weaknesses to exist as well as the strengths. Suzanne sometimes can be too literal. Over time, she learns how to be more flexible. Also, I don't really look on it as weakness, but it is human sometimes to get angry, sometimes to lose patience, sometimes to be frustrated. She gets a chance to express all those emotions. You find out that she gets tired and discouraged. She just goes from moment to moment, and every day, tries to overcome the situation she's in."

Surprisingly, Lynda Mason Green plays down the idea that her character might be a role model for young women today. "I would be very flattered," she demurs, "if that were the case. That's a responsibility I would take very seriously, but I think there are many TV programs and movies depicting woman being professionals now, so it's not all that much of a novelty. On the other hand, we women are always learning about how to behave in the workplace, about what

we expect from the workplace and what it expects from us. If Suzanne does become a positive reinforcement for women who want to become professionals, then I would be very happy."

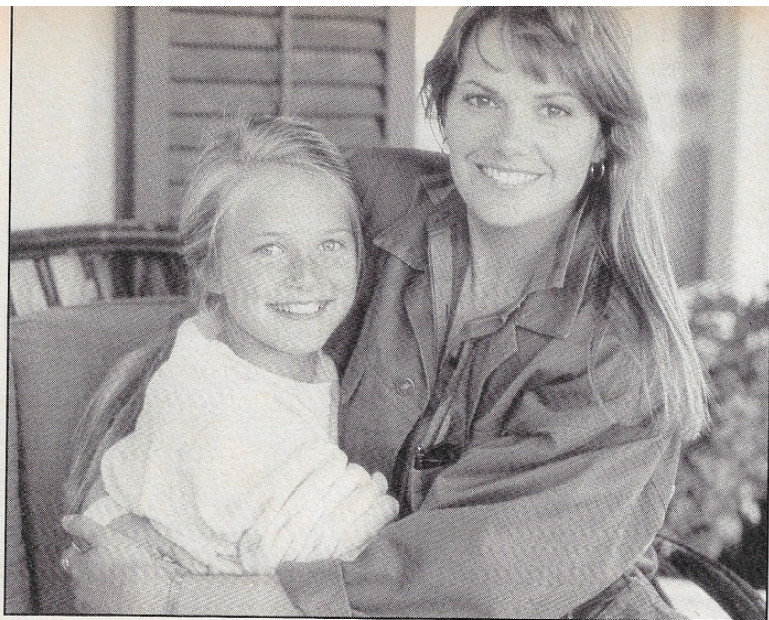
As for her own experience in the *War zone*, Mason Green comments, "It is never, never boring. It is always interesting to have another director come in, for example, because he brings a whole other influence on the circumstance. Every script is just that slight bit different. All the cast, we're all human beings who have our own wheels in our own lives—we bring all of that, to some degree, with our hearts to the work. Then, we all have this wonderful focus, this extraordinary project. The more I get to know each of these people, the more they become like family. You really do deal with them the way you deal with your own family. You forgive them the things that upset you, and you love them for the things that are great and generous gifts in the course of the work and the course of living. They become really important to you."

Thinking about the fun she has had on the set, Mason Green exclaims, laughing, "Oh, God! I remember, we had one bald director, George Bloomfield. I mean, he *shaves* his head completely. He's a real

PETER BLOCH-HANSEN, *STARLOG's* Canadian Correspondent, profiled Jared Martin in issue #141.

All War of the Worlds Photos: Copyright 1988, 1989 Paramount Pictures Corp.





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character, a very sweet man. One day he thought as a joke, he would put one of these hand fans with a suction cup on his head. He walked around with this thing whirling around on his head—it was very, very hot in the studio, this one studio that tends to get like a sweat box. And then he couldn't get it off! When three people finally sprung it off his head, there was this huge, hicky-like welt on the top for two days.

"Oh, and Gertrude! Phil's [Akin] voice-activated wheelchair. Every now and then, Gertrude gets a little idiosyncratic and veers off into a wall. Phil has taken to saying things like, 'Gertrude, run me into this wall,' or, 'Gertrude, hammer my feet against this chair.' She's in a *constant* process of being reworked and redeveloped. I've ridden in Gertrude a few times myself," she adds, breaking into laughter, "and it's *no end* of amusement!"

### Creature Combatter

One "interesting" experience was afforded the actress by the work itself. In an early episode, Suzanne is exposed to the addictive influence of a pyramidal, alien crystal which unleashes restrained personality traits. "I had a *really* good time doing that," she laughs, blushing. "It is difficult to deal with sexuality in the show's context, because then the show becomes *about* sexuality. But if it's done by using an artificial stimulant, then you can explore other aspects of personality as well. The crystal didn't so much get you stoned as break down inhibitions, Suzanne's reticence to express her sexuality. She has a hard time releasing that aspect of herself. She works in a male milieu and getting involved with the people you work with is just not done. What more happens with that idea largely depends on the writers and on audience response.

"Sometimes, the situations on the show," she reflects, "are bizarre or absurd or even ridiculous. You can be overwhelmed by it. But when you're working in fantasy or fic-

tion, you must separate yourself to a certain extent from what you perceive reality to be. You have to create a reality, so that you can believe what's happening. That's your job after all, to believe in what you're doing enough to convince the audience that you're actually doing that.

"Looking at great puddles of goo on the ground and considering them former people is absurd, but that's what it is. If you go with the show's premise, then *nothing* is absurd, so long as you don't violate the terms of the premise.

"Science fiction," she muses, "may appear to be more bizarre than 'normal' television, but in a sense, it's not. It operates, for me, on a metaphor basis. Whether aliens are the bad guys or not doesn't matter. The thing is, there's a threat there, and we're trying our best to deal with it and protect our home, our families—the things that are of value. Anyone will do that. The show's politics are metaphoric of our subliminal fear of invasion. That's possibly *not* the best political point-of-view to take at the present time, since there's much more movement all over the world right now towards reconciliation and negotiation, more acceptance and mutual respect."

Where Lynda Mason Green's expertise is not in doubt is in the business of getting started as an actress. "I've often thought about what I would say if my sister decided she wanted to become an actress. It isn't a profession that I would actually recommend, although it's really not all that different from any other business, because you're going to take garbage no matter what your business is.

"What I would suggest is that you be very, very sure you're willing to put up with whatever you have to put up with to do it. After that, you'll probably find a way to do it. If you have talent, it's just a bonus. If you really want to do it, just keep trying any way you can because it takes a long time. It's a very long haul for most people."

Now that she's more squarely in the public eye, Mason Green is encountering fan response. Her previous work came in episodes of *Night Heat* (as a member of the original cast) and *Adderly* as well as the *Amerika* mini-series, but *War of the Worlds* is a bit more visible. "We get a great many letters," she reveals, "which is great. It really gives us an idea of what people are responding to. It's a kick to write back and say, 'Hi,' and know that there are people out there watching. I've had one letter from a husband and wife team who really like Suzanne. They were very flattering about the show. Most of the rest of my mail has come from men."

After admitting that she has received no marriage proposals as of yet, Mason Green notes, "It has been mostly cordial and respectful, and very, very nice. Nothing too rude or personal. One letter said they were happy to see a woman who isn't the victim all the time and must be rescued, which was really quite nice."

Addressing the matter of the almost legendary devotion of SF fans to their heroes, she comments. "I don't know that science-fiction fans are necessarily more fanatical than people who follow *The A-Team* religiously, or anything else. We aren't on the level of turkeys just yet. My experience so far on this show is that people very politely write in and ask for an autographed picture, say that they enjoy the show, or that it's great to see a single mom or whatever. It feels like a cordial, 'Gee, we noticed what you're doing and thanks a lot.' I write back to them and send them whatever they ask for if I can," Lynda Mason Green says. "It doesn't feel like obsession at all." ✧

