

V — THE ALIEN INVASION CONTINUES
Rebels Dig In To Defend Earth

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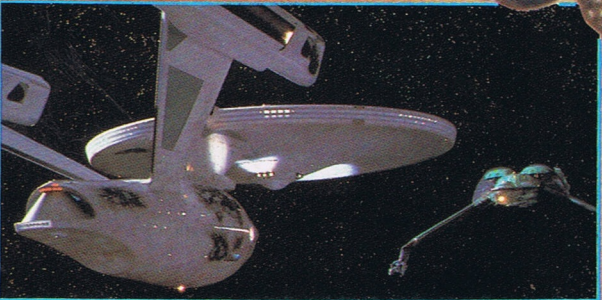
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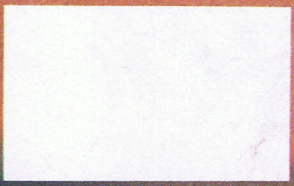


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The Series

The Visitors return to ravage Earth and the rebels dig in to defend it, while supervising producer Garner Simmons watches the war against the aliens continue weekly on NBC TV.

By BILL COTTER

It seems that Hollywood doesn't consider sequels a possibility these days, but, instead, almost an obligation. When the initial two-part "V" achieved the highest ratings for any NBC show in the 1982-83 season, work began on the sequel, "V"—*The Final Battle*, which aired last season. Discovering that it garnered even better ratings than its predecessor, NBC and Warner Bros. agreed to produce a weekly version of "V" debuting this fall.

"If you can sell a series where the premise is that lizards can disguise themselves as humans and travel 15 trillion miles through space, then storywise, you can do pretty much anything you want to do!" That's how Garner Simmons, supervising producer of "V," describes working on the upcoming series, set to air Fridays on NBC beginning October 26 (after the two mini-series have been rebroadcast). The series' major theme is, of course, not new, for the "V" story has already established the premise of alien reptiles invading Earth under the guise of friendship, and the efforts of a small band of freedom fighters to repel them. What is new is

BILL COTTER, veteran STARLOG correspondent, happens to work at Warner Bros. He filed this story after traveling far—across the street to the "V" production offices.



The men, women and lizards of "V"—Robin (Blair Tefkin), Kyle Bates (Jeff Yagher), Mike Donovan (Marc Singer), Julie Parrish (Faye Grant), Diana (Jane Badler) and Lydia (June Chadwick).

how the saga will make the switch to the requirements of a weekly TV show. Simmons is part of the team masterminding that transition. As in the last mini-series, the production is under the guidance of executive producers Robert Singer and Daniel Blatt.

Like many others in the TV business, Simmons followed a circuitous route to his present position. After earning a degree in English at Colgate University, he had several jobs—driving cabs and tending bar—until enrolling in Northwestern University's film department.

He then moved to California to write a book on director Sam Peckinpah. When 20th Century Fox optioned a screenplay he had written, Simmons' new career took hold. Although that first film was never produced, a series of jobs followed, including work on *Falcon Crest* and *The Yellow Rose* as well as numerous scripts for feature films. This new project excites him, thanks to the potential

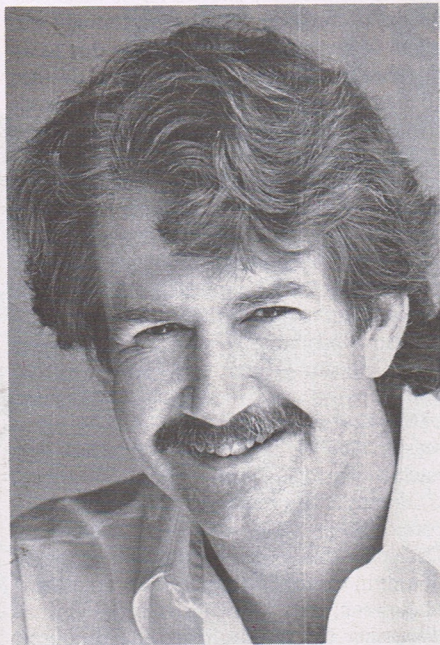
the format offers and the challenge of producing an exciting story each week. "Part of the appeal of a show such as 'V,'" he comments, "is that it presents ordinary people in an extraordinary setting. What you want is a show where people say, 'If this was really happening, I wouldn't be lizard food. I would join the resistance and beat those bastards!'"

Lizard Loose Ends

When the initial "V" (STARLOG #71) ended, many viewers howled in protest, complaining that the story was left without a conclusion. Although audiences also had to wait several years to see how the plot elements in *The Empire Strikes Back* were resolved, "V" fans had the additional worry that a sequel might never be produced. So, it was decided that "V"—*The Final Battle* should conclude the saga in case a series did not follow. The producers left themselves an out by allowing

the villainous Visitor leader, Diana, to escape. Simmons readily admits this is much the same as Darth Vader's exit in *Star Wars*, noting that the loophole allows them to logically continue the story of "V."

Even with Diana's escape, a number of key elements had to be determined before production could begin. Simmons credits several of these decisions to Steve de Souza, who left the show before filming began. "Obviously," Simmons comments, "there's a need to tie the various pieces together, and to explain away several problems created in the mini-series. Steve lent much of his interest in science fiction to the initial concept of how we would transform what was in the mini-series into what will be in the on-going series."



Supervising producer Garner Simmons.

The first decision concerned the setting, *when* would the events of the series occur. "Our initial thought was to assume that several years had passed and then the aliens came back, but David Braff, one of the key writers, had the idea of setting it immediately after Diana's escape," says Simmons. "Now, we have Donovan spot her and pursue her to the ground, where she's captured and put on trial." Braff, along with Brian Taggart, who helped script the sequel, is joined by co-writers Paul Edwards and David Abramowitz on the show's writing staff.

Other items which had to be dealt with included Martin (Frank Ashmore), the leader of the Fifth Column movement in the alien ranks, the Mothership that the rebels captured from Diana, and the deadly "red dust" used to drive away the Visitors. Each of these issues is explored in the series' first two episodes, "Liberation Day" and "The Scorcher."

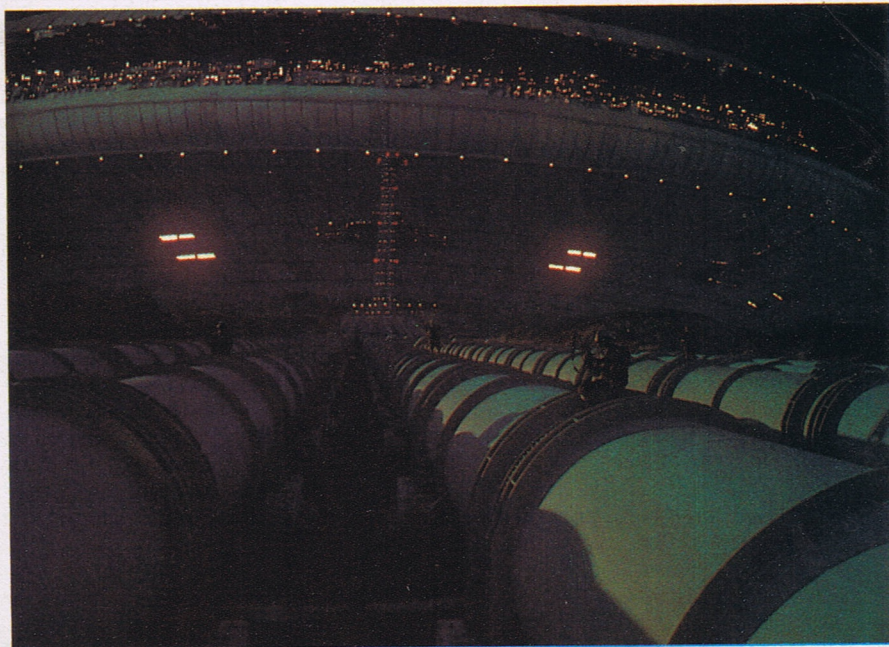
"Martin was obviously an on-going problem for us," Simmons explains. "If we, as humans, have access to someone who has a lot of information on the aliens, then we get into these murky areas of how much do we know, how much do they know, how much do they know we know, and where do we

draw the line?" Feeling that a believable war requires a certain number of secrets on both sides, the producers realized that Martin had to be eliminated, but in an explainable fashion.

Although the capture of the alien ship was a suitable climax for the sequel, the producers felt it also posed a serious problem for the series. "There is an advantage to us in an on-going conflict," Simmons notes. "There are several constraints placed on the humans, as well as on the aliens, and the question becomes, if we have a ship, why don't we just use it against them?" Thus, the "V" series opens with a team of human scientists examining the ship and its secrets, but when Diana unleashes a new weapon on Los

The main locale for the "V" series will remain Los Angeles, where Diana re-establishes her headquarters, but Simmons promises that the efforts of the rebel fighters located elsewhere *will* be seen. "There definitely will be forays to these other areas," he says. "The analogy might be that Los Angeles is like the island of Great Britain in World War II, under siege, but still a base for operations against the enemy."

With the dust of death swept up under the storyline, the producers had to provide a logical reason for Diana's return to Earth. "If the aliens were limited to their spaceships, and we were stuck down here, the only way we could have face-to-face confrontations would be for them to come down here or us to



Initially, the aliens arrived to steal Earth's fresh water supply. (As in this scene from the first telefilm.) This weak plot thread has been shelved for now.

Angeles, the rebels employ their hijacked ship to defeat her in an unexpected way which also negates this plot weakness.

Perhaps the most critical decision required was how to allow the aliens to return to Earth. In "V"—*The Final Battle*, the freedom fighters had dispersed a deadly "red dust" into the atmosphere. Safe to humans, the dust instantly kills aliens on contact. Or does it?

The Visitors discover that certain cities seem safe again; something has killed the red dust bacteria. Soon, the aliens and resistance movement both arrive at the unsettling conclusion. "The red dust peril is somewhat mitigated by temperature," Simmons explains, "and it needs an incubation period to survive. Those cities in colder climates offer this period, but in warmer places, such as Albuquerque or Los Angeles, the dust loses its deadly effect."

Further research shows that a heavy concentration of red dust causes genetic mutations in plant and animal life, preventing re-application of the bacteria to those cities where the Visitors have returned. As a result, waves of Shocktroopers take total control of numerous cities, opposed only by small bands of resistance fighters.

go up there," Simmons explains. "What we've tried to do is to take the best of both worlds. We keep the Mothership up there, but allow the Visitors to establish a base on the ground in Los Angeles." This headquarters is referred to as an embassy, allowing Diana a place from which to operate while providing the writers with opportunities for the rebels to attack the invaders in a conventional setting.

Establishing the rationale behind this embassy concept is a critical point to the series' success, and the producers have introduced a new character, Nathan Bates, to help them. Bates, played by Lane Smith (currently on view in *Red Dawn*), is the brains behind the red dust. He has gathered together a large stockpile of it in Los Angeles, which he uses to threaten Diana into cooperating with him, even if to use it means ecological ruin. Bates sees the alien invasion as an opportunity to establish himself as a power broker between the Visitors and the human race, and proudly announces he has established a treaty making Los Angeles a "free city," safe from alien attack.

The alliance is an uneasy one, for the humans are all too well aware of the Visitors'

true nature. However, no one has much of a choice, for the Visitors' planet is revealed to now be totally dead, and Earth has become their last hope for survival. This situation prevents Diana from unleashing another "Doomsday" weapon, since the aliens must capture the planet intact. The humans, of course, want to repel the Visitors, but not at the risk of their own destruction. Bates complicates this struggle by informing on the rebel plans when it suits his needs, but as Simmons wryly comments, "He needs the resistance to keep Diana in line. After all, he's human, and if he goes too far, he knows he's someone's breakfast, too."

Human Costs

"V" fans will be glad to know that the major cast members are returning. The series stars Marc Singer as Mike Donovan (STARLOG #84), Jane Badler as the evil Diana, and Faye Grant as Julie Parrish (STARLOG #82). Also reprising their mini-series roles are Michael Ironside as the mercenary Ham Tyler (STARLOG #74), Robert Englund as Willie the meek Visitor, and Blair Tefkin as Robin, the rebel fighter and mother to a half-human, half-alien child.

However, there will be changes in some of these existing characters as well as the addition of several other new protagonists.

Julie Parrish, for example, has decided to return to her intended career as a scientist. She now works for Bates, helping his team decipher the workings of the captured Visitor technology. Donovan feels she has "sold out," and their relationship begins to feel the strain. A number of other roles will be reduced or eliminated as the series progresses.

The biggest change involves Elizabeth, the half-alien, half-human child born to Robin in the sequel. She undergoes another transformation which unnaturally ages her (and covers a switch in actresses to Jennifer Cooke). It's known that Elizabeth possesses

A friendly Visitor, Willie (Robert Englund), returns for another round against those other not-so-nice lizards.



some unusual powers, as displayed in "V"—*The Final Battle* when she defused the doomsday weapon, but the young hybrid is unaware of their true extent and just how to control them.

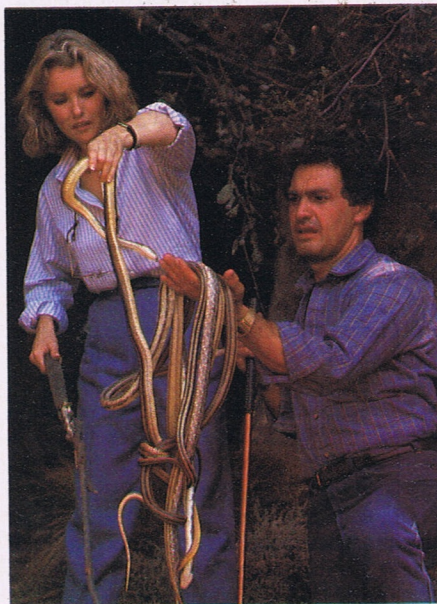
The series will also introduce a new face among the opposition, Lydia, as played by English actress June Chadwick. Lydia is Diana's rival in the alien fleet, and, in fact, she took command of it during Diana's imprisonment. The writer's guide to "V" describes Lydia as the head of the Visitors' version of the Gestapo. In fact, she may actually be more deadly to humans than Diana.

During the mini-series, there were several references to "The Leader," head of the alien world. No decision has been made yet as to whether or not The Leader will be shown, but he is said to be waiting in space with the fleet, ready to take command of Earth when human resistance is eradicated.

An additional plot element will be the introduction of a forbidden alien religion known as Zon, the very mention of which is punishable by death. During the "V" series, it's revealed that the practitioners of Zon are pacifists, and they may hold the secret to defeating the alien invasion. Simmons feels that this idea will help add depth to the alien characters, moving things away from a simple "good vs. evil" confrontation by "shading the Visitors' background with some facts about how their society has developed. It's not going to all be black and white. This change will give Diana some things to do other than just stand there acting evil. It will probably replace the Fifth Column in our stories."

Following the casting changes, the next problem facing the production team was the cost of producing "V" on a weekly basis. Initially, Warner Bros. rejected NBC's series offer as financially unfeasible. The heavy reliance on special FX is the main problem, with Simmons observing that each laser pistol

Rebel leader Julie Parrish (Faye Grant) and Robert (Michael Durrell) deal with some distant cousins to the reptilian Visitors.



blast costs \$600, and "That puts certain constraints on what we can do. For example, a short battle with about 25 shots in it costs upward of \$15,000. If you cut out the guns, it's not as interesting."

One way around that expensive visual obstacle was the introduction of a new alien weapon, a "stunner." Described as "a cross between a cattle prod and a curling iron," it can either stun or kill depending on the setting. Use will also be made where possible of existing footage shot for the two mini-series, a common TV industry practice.

The strange speech pattern of the Visitors will also be altered. "Besides being expensive, which it is, some voices don't reproduce as well as others," Simmons states. "It's a question of harmonics, and we felt it wasn't essential to the show." Although thought was given to explaining the change as due to an advance in Visitor technology, it was decided to merely simplify matters in the first episode by dropping any mention of a vocal change.

New effects, however will be introduced, like the master weapon in "Scorcher," a deadly drone spaceship. Another area which will eventually be explored is the addition of several new alien creatures, which Simmons promises will not be injected only to shock viewers, but to add to the story elements.

Also upcoming this year is a major merchandising effort, with Visitor weapons and ships—perfect for young humans and baby lizards—ready for the Christmas season. The "V" paperback series from Pinnacle (both original stories and novelizations) is already storming bookstores. The "V" comic book series from DC debuts in December. Simmons chuckles at the thought of kids in Visitor costumes trick or treating at Halloween, but then turns serious while discussing the responsibility the producers feel towards young viewers.

"We're an 8 p.m. show, and as a result, NBC's Standards and Practices department is literally concerned on a daily basis with what we do. Our problem is, how do we show a war without violence?" Sensitive to possible criticism, Simmons hastens to add, "We try to do it in implied ways rather than explicit ways, and sometimes it's more effective. Also, we feel there's a need to tell children that whatever happens to the characters must be dealt with. If one character kills another, there's some residual effect, such as guilt or remorse.

"We also try to show that the Visitors have a totally different sense of values, where killing is perfectly OK and everyone is expendable. And we try to signify that our way, the human way, is the better of the two. I want children to know that it's not OK to tear someone's face off."

Garner Simmons summarizes his task at the helm of the weekly SF TV series as "a challenge, but I think a rewardable one. We have high hopes for the show, as does NBC, and we intend to make it fun for the viewers. It's not going to a constant look at a bleak and unwinnable war. Instead, "V" will be a chance for people to identify with the ideals of the resistance, while also enjoying the action." ★