

The INVISIBLE MAN

Coffee Cups Floating on Wires? Not on this Souped-Up Revision

By Dan Scapperotti

The television landscape is littered with the remains of shows featuring invisible men, and Matt Greenberg knows it. With writing credits on such films as HALLOWEEN H2O and PROPHECY 2, Greenberg was approached by the USA Network with a proposed invisible man series. "They said they'd like to do a series about an invisible man," said the writer. "My initial reaction was that this whole invisibility thing has been done to death. I knew they were doing HOLLOW MAN, so I originally was going to turn it down. Suddenly in the middle of the night, 3 AM, my eyes popped open. 'QUICKSILVER!'"

In THE INVISIBLE MAN, Darien Fawkes, played by Vincent Ventresca, is a low-level burglar who agrees to become a test-subject for Kevin, his scientist brother. He is implanted with a "quicksilver gland," a creature that secretes a silver hormone that covers Darien's body and renders him invisible. Fortunately, he can shake it off at will.

"It was like negotiating a mine field," said Greenberg, "because I knew that fans, especially science fiction fans, know every trick and turn. So the mandate that I set for myself was to take every expectation of what an invisible man series is and kind of turn it on its ear. That was the

genesis of it. There are so many clichés that we associate with invisibility, like here comes the floating pen and he's taking off his clothes and all that sort of thing. I thought, I'm not going to have my lead walking around naked all the time, and I'm not going to have him invisible all the time, especially when we're paying him X-amount per episode. We want to see the guy."

Having come up with a unique take on the invisible aspects of the show, Greenberg turned his attention to the char-

acter. "I came up with [the idea that] this is a guy who in his heart-of-hearts has a good soul, but he was so messed up and turned around. Ironically, once he had this ability, he saw himself much more clearly than he ever had before."

After the death of his brother in the pilot, Darien is hauled in by a clandestine, under-funded government agency headed by "the Offi-

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(Paul Ben-Victor), a seedy-looking but capable agent with a slight mercenary streak.

In the pilot, Darien originally had an estranged girlfriend, Casey, played by Rebecca Chambers, who is kidnapped by the terrorists. When the show

went to series, Casey disappeared. "I originally envisioned the Casey character having a lot more presence," said Greenberg. "Then, when we started planning the series, there just wasn't a way to make it work

with the character's growth and on-going conflicts. That was a shame because Rebecca Chambers did remarkable work."

Another major challenge Greenberg faced was finding a thematic vision for the series. "One of the things that I wrestled with as a writer and creator of the series was trying to find a tone for the series that was somewhat daring but at the same time internally consistent," he said. "My personality tends towards the wacky or the horrific. In my early drafts it would be very wacky or way too horrific." The network wanted the series grounded in reality, which meant that Greenberg had to find a medium between the horror and the comedy. "The thing they really pushed me towards, and in this



writing her. She's doing a great job of it."

The show is filmed in San Diego, where the production company, Stu Seagall Production, has its studios. "Its mostly a financial decision," explained Glasser. "We can get more bang for the buck down there. People down there are hungrier to work, and there isn't a lot of production in San Diego."

Encore Video, the visual effects branch of Los Angeles post-house Hollywood Digital, was selected to do the numerous visual effects for the show. Biggest challenge: having to expand on the simple invisibility tricks that were state-of-the-art in 1933, but are mundane by today's standards. "They've done a great job," said Glasser about the effects house. "They're all fans of the show, so they sometimes go beyond the call of duty, which I love. We had an episode where we basically ran out of money because there were a lot of effects in it. There was a shot that I had mentioned off hand that I didn't like, and a few days later the effects guy came in and said 'Here's a freebie.' He had done this amazing effect where you could see through Darien's head."

It seems that almost every week, Darien is called on to sneak into a high-security facility. This provides Glasser and his team their own set of problems. "There are only so many ways he can sneak into some place," said Glasser. "We try to come up with different ones." In "It Hurts When I do This," a script Glasser wrote, Darien has to get into a locked, guarded hospital. The solution was unique: "We had to get him in there, and we didn't just want to follow someone in as we do so often. I had him come to the hospital with the Keeper and just quicksilver his arms. [The Keeper presented him as] a double amputee [who] was feeling phantom limbs, and she had to get him in immediately. The urgency of this double amputee made them let them in! That's the kind of fun stuff that we try to come up with." CFQ

much can you do with that? It's just a guy who's invisible. Then as I got to know the show, I realized the characters are the ones who make it so wonderful. There is a great deal of comedy on

For the second season, a new character was added. Actress Brandy Ledford was brought on-board as Alex Monroe, who joins the group with her own agenda, and wants to use the Agency for her own ends. "Brandy is coming in as the tough agent who doesn't put up with their craziness and isn't impressed at all with the invisibility," said Glasser. "She's a lot of fun."

"There were a number of reasons to introduce her. We felt we needed another woman because we only had one, the Keeper, who is wonderful but we had three guys and only one woman. We found a lot of times when we were writing the scripts that we could use another agent in the field because the Keeper is always back at the lab. So we came up with Alex. Brandy is fitting in to that very well. She's kind of playing the fifth wheel on purpose, and that's how we're

QUICKSILVER THINKING: Vincent Ventresca plays a government operative with a few more secrets than normal in the Sci Fi Channel series, *THE INVISIBLE MAN*.

case I'm glad they did, was to create something that had a tone that was still somewhat grounded. That's what I finally did."

After writing and executive producing the pilot and the *INVISIBLE MAN*'s first couple of episodes, illness in the family forced Greenberg to drop out of the project. Enter David Levinson and Jonathan Glasser.

Despite the special effects, Glasser feels that the program is character-driven. "When I was first approached to do the show I thought, *Invisible man! How*

the show; there's as much comedy as science fiction. That comes out of our two lead characters and actors who are both very funny guys. You write anything and Vincent Ventresca and Paul Ben-Victor make it twice as funny just by their delivery. Hobbes in particular is just fun. If you put the two guys in a room while you're writing, you can write 20 pages of them just doing their shtick. We have to hold ourselves back because they're so much fun."