

Regular readers will remember our interview with "V" writer/director/producer Kenneth Johnson back in issue 66. At the time, the first "V" mini-series had not been scheduled for airing on British television and there were no signs from either of the tv networks that it would be.

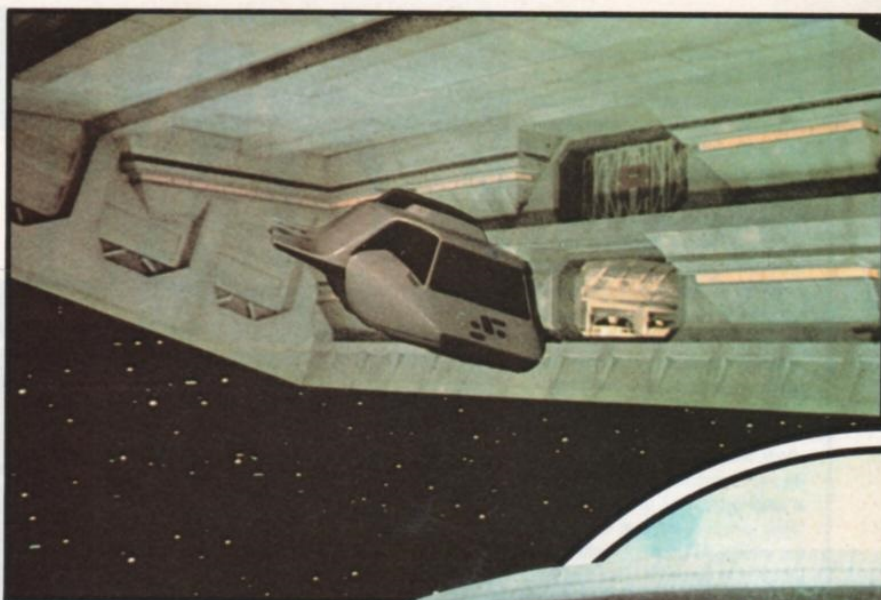
The sequel, "V II" came and went on American tv – and still no sign of the show on domestic television. Then, when Britain's commercial network channel pulled out of covering the Olympic Games last August at the last minute, something had to be found to fill the suddenly vacant air-time. What they found was "V"...

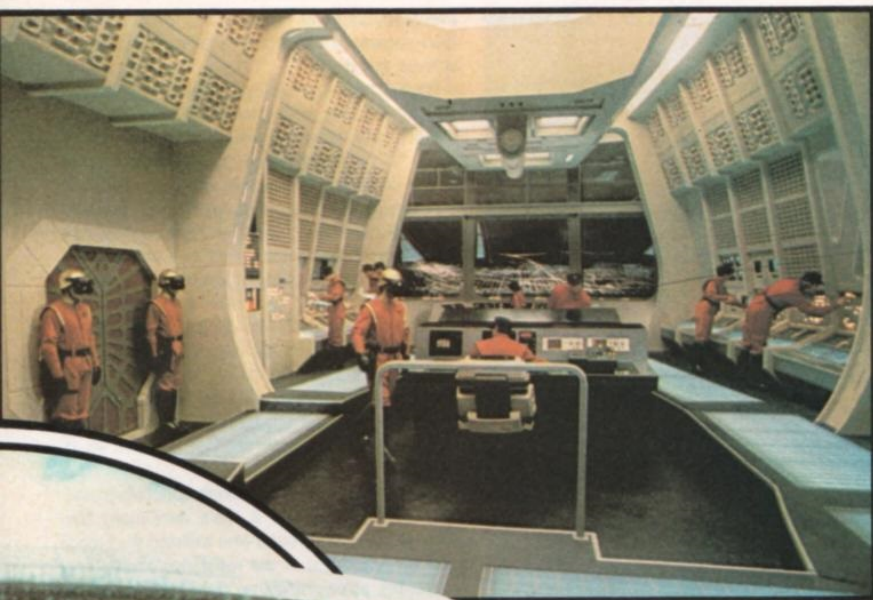
Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier visited the "V II" set, interviewed members of the cast and crew and delivered their article which we intended to print after "V" was aired here. But ITV out-foxed us and transmitted the shows consecutively – so much for our planning! So, better late than never, *Starburst* presents a feature on the making of "V II".

Last May, NBC aired in the United States a highly successful, four part mini-series called "V". The show told, in realistic detail, the story of the arrival of alien visitors on Earth, and of their eventual domination over Mankind through the use of media manipulation and terrorism.

Towards the end of the programme, the Visitors' true nature and purpose were revealed: they were reptilian creatures masquerading as humans and they had come to Earth to steal our water and use the human race for food! Fortunately, a group of resistance fighters, led by actors Marc Singer and Faye Grant, had sprung up. "V" ended leaving many unanswered questions for the viewers to ponder, including the fate of one of the women characters who had been made pregnant by one of the aliens...

For the record, ITV transmitted "V" on Monday 30th July and Tuesday 31st July 1984. "V II" ran from Wednesday 1st August to Friday 3rd August 1984. Just thought you'd like to know where the break came!





Top left: An alien scout ship leaves an orbiting Mother Ship. Top right: The inside of the Mother Ship control room. Note the panorama of Los Angeles glimpsed through the viewport. Centre left: In a rebel raid on a National Guard armoury a visitor is destroyed by fire. Centre: The Visitors' ship hovers about Los Angeles. Centre right: More death by fire: the rebels firebomb a parked scout ship. Bottom left: Hero Donovan (Marc Singer) has a close encounter with an unidentified Visitor aboard the alien command ship. Bottom right: During the same visit, Donovan witnesses extraterrestrial nasty Diana (Jane Badler) taking a lunch break.

"V" was the highest-rated show of the NBC-TV season and, although there was talk of packaging it as a movie for overseas release in Europe, nothing happened. Meanwhile, NBC toyed with the idea of turning it into a weekly, hour-long series. However, that idea was scrapped due to the high production costs that such a programme would require. Last summer, NBC, Warner Bros and "V" creator Ken Johnson, came up with a concept for a second mini-series to fill in the blanks left by the first broadcast.

Johnson wrote a first set of scripts, but, according to Warner Bros sources, let go of the project when the burden of preparing it for its scheduled May release date became too much. Johnson was unavailable for comment. To fill in for Johnson, Warner Bros asked the team of Daniel H. Blatt, and Robert Singer to become the executive producers of "V II". Their previous credits include *Cujo*, *The Howling* and the recent *Sadat* mini-series. "V II" had a \$14 million budget and utilises over 90 speaking roles and more than 300 crew members and technicians.

A visit to Sound Stage 24 of The Burbank Studios confirmed the importance that has been placed on "V II". The entire stage was transformed into the interior of a Visitor mothership. In unused corners of the set, large groups of orange-garbed Visitors sit around, waiting for their shooting calls. Director Richard Heffron talks about his part in the series. "I got involved only about six weeks before we started. I'd seen the first "V" and liked it very much. I'd been struck by its contents, and thought it would be fun to do the sequel. I'd done one other science fiction picture called *Futureworld*, and I've always liked the genre. I loved the idea of doing this kind of metaphor for the Nazi occupation in WWII, changing it to people from outer space who were lizards, but who used the same techniques of divide and conquer. I thought it was very clever."

Marc Singer, who plays free-lance cameraman and rebel Donovan, strongly believes in the message behind the series. "It is a show that is based upon some values and some realities that we all should remember are important. One of the things that Ken Johnson, the original writer/director/producer, really wanted to stress was how a society could be subverted, and its standards changed from something good to something evil through coercion, propaganda, enticement and fear. . . We saw Americans, in a time of national crisis, doing things that we don't like to think we would do. Turning their backs on their neighbours, etc. . . Then, there are those who act in just the opposite way and set a good example by trying to set society on a normal course."

Obviously, Singer was pleased with the reception of the first "V". "I was very thrilled. On one hand, action-adventure is what I want to do most of all in my career. That makes me excited, makes me happy and keeps the adrenalin flowing. On the other hand,



everybody wants the work that they're involved in to have substance and dignity. I believe that we did achieve that in "V".

Frank Ashmore, who plays a "good" alien, Martin, and Jane Badler, who plays the part of beautiful Visitor Diana talk about their surprise and delight when "V" became a ratings hit, while relaxing next to the darkened, mothership corridors. Badler is sitting next to an eerie sculpture of herself, that later on will be used for a close up of Diana swallowing a whole rabbit. Both actors loved their characters, a departure from the types of roles they have usually played. "I loved playing Diana!" says Badler. "It's probably the most fun part I've ever played. I like the fact that my character is an alien. It's so nice to have the freedom to be able to show all those feelings that in real life you have to suppress because it's not acceptable – and get paid for it! Besides, who really knows what lizard people are like? So, I can set all the rules."

Ashmore too feels very strongly about his character. "During World War II, there were many Germans in the underground who assisted the French and the Americans in the resistance efforts," explains the actor. "Because, they knew what the ultimate outcome of Nazism would be, and they couldn't condone it. Martin is essentially, metaphorically speaking, that type of a man. He sees that this is – the word inhuman is probably not correct when you're talking about an alien! – but he can see that what they're doing is evil. Especially after he's had the emotional exchange he has with his friend Donovan. I was born in 1945. My father was in the airforce and paid a heavy price, being a young man involved in that whole scene, so I feel very strongly about the series and my character. I respect anybody who would stick their necks out the way the



Top: Donovan (Marc Singer) grapples with an alien whose cover he's blown. Small pictures, left to right: Daniel (David Packer), a human traitor, and Robin (Blair Tefkin), the daughter of a rebel. The hero's son Sean is put on ice for future use by the aliens. Stoooge of the aliens, a tv announcer called Kristine (Jenny Sullivan), discovers the aliens' awful secret. In a dream sequence Sean is killed by the aliens while escaping from their ship. Above: The aliens arrive looking like refugees from Hitler's Germany. Opposite page: The hardcore of the rebel movement. Front row, left to right, Marc Singer, Faye Grant, Michael Wright; back row, left to right: Blair Tefkin, Mickey Jones and Michael Ironside.

resistance people of the Forties did."

With shooting having been started in October, for a six-hour programme that was to be broadcast the first week of May, time is the enemy to conquer. "Since most of the cast were people that had been in the first "V", it was possible to cast the picture very quickly," says Heffron. "That was the only part of filming "V" that was easy. I had no idea it was going to be quite as enormous as it has been. This is a very complicated, difficult and expensive piece. It's probably more complicated than the science fiction feature I did, and there's a good deal less time to do it in, because we have only a 65-day shooting schedule for six hours of television. Fortunately, I have some very good people to work with, people with whom I've worked before."

One of the people involved is Martin Rabinowitz, the Production Designer. An artist and sculptor who lives in New Mexico, Rabinowitz confines his motion picture work to one project a year. In the past he has worked on fantasy projects, such as the ill-fated television version of *Logan's Run* and Tobe Hooper's *Salem's Lot*. "I was called by the director at the very beginning of October. I had worked with him

before. I worked it out with the studio and came in within days and began working on the film. The first episode showed the scale of the mothership. When we measured it out on the matte shots, it came to three miles wide. But it had never been reflected in the interiors. Most of them, like Diana's chambers, were shown to be very tiny. Mr Heffron's idea was that we had a chance to correct that, and repropotion the audience's ideas as to the magnitude of the interiors. We also had the chance to see out of the spaceship, down to Los Angeles."

To enhance the image of the ship's immense size, Rabinowitz designed a new, elaborate Master Control Room and Communications centre, as well as a high-tech "conversion chamber" where uncooperative earthlings are made to see the error of their ways. "In designing the control room/communications centre," explains the production designer, "we used some of the modular and design facets that already existed. I couldn't go totally far afield from where they started. The rest of the design comes out of my own sculpting background. We started shooting within three weeks of the time I started on the show. They didn't know the progression of what was going to come first, second, third or fourth. We had no shooting schedule. We had to be preparing everything in the entire show at the same time."

Director Heffron admits that "V II" has been under continuous time pressure. "We've been shaping the picture as we go," says Heffron. "Actually, it's three pictures. Sometimes I forget about that, six hours is a long time. We're using all the tricks that we have to get it done. For example, we're trying to do all the photography for the first two hour movie early, so that it can be almost finished by the time we're done shooting the rest. We had to change the way we



scheduled the movie, so that those shots that needed optical special effects were done first. It is fortunate that we've shot the picture more or less in order. As the story evolves, and we see the way the characters are relating to each other, we can continue to make changes that make sense. It's a way of really improving the movie.

"Another trick that we used," continues Heffron, "was to reduce the number of opticals, which really means to reduce the number of times that Visitors' ships fly through the air of Los Angeles. The opticals require so much advance time, that there really wasn't any way to do that in time for a May screening. Unfortunately, central to the plot that we started with, was the story of the rebels stealing the Visitors' ships and flying about the world in them. But, basically, I feel that the central theme of "V II" comes from the story of a group of amateurs who try to resist these very powerful people from another place. It's not so bad that they didn't get their hands on all these twenty-first century vehicles, that they're stuck with their own talents, hands and small weapons. I think it makes good drama." Singer, who does many of his own stunts in the

film, talks about an experience with a decidedly un-twenty-first century type of transportation. "We did a horse riding sequence. The horses performed beautifully, and as usual, the stuntmen were professional perfection. Then, we had to do the close ups. That required riding on a different horse, behind the camera car. The car was travelling at about twenty-five miles per hour and I was galloping on a less comfortable animal that was very skittish. At one point, the director said, 'Ride on past the car'. So, I dug into the horse a little bit, it picked up its gait, and we rode up alongside of the car. We were on this very narrow road, with hardly any room to get past. Yet, we passed the front end of the car and, as we did, the horse suddenly got frightened of something, and began to fall beneath the front of the truck . . .

"I managed to control the horse and pull him back out of it, but in doing so, I lost both stirrups. Meanwhile, the driver of the truck hadn't noticed all this, because he was watching for the crew in the back of the truck. The horse then threw me to the side, and I almost fell under the truck. But, fortunately I managed to stay on." The actor adds philosophi-

cally, "Another day, another dollar. The bottom line is, if I weren't doing that, I'd be bored!"

When asked about what she liked the most in the sequel, Badler pauses before answering, "I think what happens to Robin, the girl who has been impregnated by a lizard, and the child she ultimately creates, is absolutely fascinating. I think people will really love that. There's a lot of special effects with it, and then it takes on a whole new story with the child. The ending is really neat. It doesn't just end, it also addresses the real problems of our world - that people are all fighting each other. Because of the situation of the Visitors, they've had to join hands and fight an alien force. The end makes you aware that if we could all band together, life would be much better."

Ashmore agrees, "It is not only an allegory, but it is also timely," he says. "I don't think that Ken Johnson, or Dan Blatt, realised at the time that they took this on, that the programme is going to air in 1984. It has a tremendous Orwellian overtone. This three-mile wide space craft hovering over a major city like Los Angeles - essentially it is Big Brother."

V

"Plumbing the depths".
A Starburst TV Review
by Bob Shaw

I have a friend who thought *The Battle of Britain* was a rotten movie because one scene showed a 1942 Spitfire with a type of gunsight which didn't become available until 1944.

"You're silly for fretting over details like that," I told him airily, not concealing my amusement. "It's the sweep of the action that counts."

I also have a friend who deserted a perfectly good booze-up well before closing time because he didn't want to miss that night's episode of *V*, the sf mini-series which invaded our TV screens at the end of July.

When I mentioned the impossibility of paying any serious heed to a story in which reptiles can cross-fertilise humans, he smiled and said, "It doesn't matter about details like that - I want to find out what's going to happen."

Same thing? The other side of the coin? Sauce for the gander?

Well, I maintain that it isn't, and the difference is all to do with respect. Respect for one's craft; respect for one's audience.

A director making a film about the sinking of the *Graf Spee* simply can't lay his hands on the original vessel, therefore it is acceptable that he will do a little fudging with the aid of some ex-W.D. hardware. But the director of a science fiction or fantasy movie has no such constrictions, and therefore no excuses. He starts off with a clean slate, and it's entirely up to him what he puts on it.

He has unlimited opportunity to soar the heights. On the other hand, he has equal freedom to plumb the depths.

Which brings us neatly back to *V*.

The opening minutes were a strange blend of your standard Nam-is-hell movie and *Star Trek* - a sort of *Spock-alypse Now*, if you like. There was quite a bit of competent footage of a clean-cut American war correspondent nearly getting himself killed by helicopter gunships which were raiding a Third World village. My aviation expert friend would probably have begun to fidget during the scene in which a Guevara look-alike shot down one of the attacking gunships with a pistol, but I was able to tolerate that. As I said above - it's the sweep of the action that counts.

And then, just as the reporter was about to be whittled down to his ankles by a multi-barrelled cannon at a range of ten paces, the battle was aborted thanks to the arrival of a giant alien spaceship. The ship was of the frisbee pattern which is *de rigeur* for alien craft, and we quickly learned that that fifty of them had appeared in our skies and that the other forty-nine were

hovering above Earth's capital cities. (It was never made clear why the odd one out had chosen to hover over *Chez Guevara*, but as it saved a lead character's life perhaps it would have been ungracious to pursue the point.)

The saucer which was parked over Washington, D.C., soon disgorged the alien leader, a character who looked and acted like Walter Mondale except that he refrained from saying, "Where's the meat?" This was very prudent of him under the circumstances, because it might have given the aliens' game away.

They were, you see, here to eat us.

They also planned, while they were at it, to steal all the Earth's water - conditions on their home planet apparently having gone far beyond the ban-on-sprinklers phase.

For reasons best known to themselves, the visitors didn't exploit their superior might by simply pitching in and eating us and draining our seas. Instead, they cooked up a story about interstellar co-operation and did a great deal of friendly mingling with the human population.

This was particularly devious of them because the aliens had another big secret up their sleeves. Up their trouser legs as well, one might add, because it transpired that they were actually green reptiles done up in a sort of jiffy wrap of pink plastic which made them look human.

Those pink coverings must have been masterpieces of cosmetic science because any saurian who slipped one on immediately had his eyes shifted from the side of his head to the frontal location preferred by humans; his foot-long forked tongue trimmed to more manageable proportions; and his hundred-or-so spiky teeth decently concealed behind NHS dentures. (There was no reference to the long tails which are sported by most self-respecting reptiles, but we've all heard of docking in space.)

The only fault I could find with the plastic sheaths was that they could easily be, and quite frequently were, ripped away from the face like bubble gum, but it is traditional in screen sf for alien technology to be somewhat uneven.

This most often shows up in portable weapons, and those in *V* were no exception. All the visitors' sidearms emitted *slow-moving* blobs of radiation, a direct hit from which could result in anything - depending on the exigencies of the plot - from instantaneous death to an effect like a box of Swan Vestas igniting in one's pocket.

One nod towards plausibility was that the aliens spoke through artificial voice boxes. This was demonstrated by the fact that their voices had a wasp-in-a-jamjar quality - that old uneven technology again - like a radio whose front is about to drop off. Unfortunately *V*'s sound technicians sometimes forgot to do their stuff and the aliens, particularly those who were





shown to have good qualities, occasionally spoke normally.

Yes, some of the ordinary worker-type aliens did have a sympathetic side to their nature and became friendly with humans. *Very* friendly, as it turned out. That was in sharp contrast to their commanders, who were unmitigated nasties with a disconcerting habit of cramming small furry animals down their gullets, alive and whole, during lulls in the conversation. The message was that ordinary people/lizards everywhere have an innate goodness and it is the power-seekers of this universe who bring about all our woes.

Now and then during this preposterous series there were similar attempts to comment on human nature and the Eternal Truths, but the screenplay writers were, perhaps, too modest to use their own voices and contented themselves with borrowing bits from other films. Spot-the-movie became quite an engrossing game for film buffs in *V*'s audience. The work of contemporary Hollywood directors was mined most, but the discerning eye could pick out a leavening of Bunuel here and there.

The plot of *V* was one which had become well established in pulp sci-

ence fiction by the 1930s – some humans saw through the aliens' sham and organised a resistance movement, ultimately triumphing in spite of their lack of numbers through being clever, brave, resourceful and elusive. But where *V* differed from the typical *Thrilling Wonder Stories* offering of my boyhood was in the fraternisation which took place between some reptiles and some humans.

That would never have been allowed in the old days!

It was always a well-known characteristic of bug-eyed monsters that they had an unnatural appetite for our women-folk, and – although such things couldn't even be hinted at in a more prudish era – our fevered imaginations led us to suspect that as well as being peckish they wanted to get their leg, tentacle or pseudopod over. Things never got as far as that, of course. Captain Comet always intervened in time.

And here in 1984 we have the whole thing on television. The notion of romantic encounters between reptiles and humans has a repulsive fascination, and may have a lot to do with the success we are told *V* had in the States. ▶



Opposite top: A makeup test shot of a Visitor whose cover has been blown. In the actual show, the makeup did look better! Opposite below: Mike Donovan (Marc Singer) and Tony (Evan Kim), laden down with the tools of their trade, run for their lives during the opening sequence of the first episode. Top left: Diana (Jane Badler) and Pamela (Sarah Douglas) are angry to discover that a fallen rebel is actually one of their own people. Centre left: A Visiting scout ship zooms across the LA skyscape. Bottom left: Rebel Taylor (Jason Bernard) is saved from almost certain death by Nice Visitor Willie (Robert Englund). Above: Tony and Donovan are startled to witness a huge space craft hovering above them in the opening moments of *V*.

► It also raises some intriguing questions.

Should an alien lizard who gets the hots – if cold-blooded creatures can do such a thing – for a woman be regarded as a pervert? Or is he simply showing that his heart, not to mention other bits of his anatomy, is in the right place? And did the producers of *V* consider the sub-title “Love is not having to say you’re saurian”?

No doubt many people will consider the whole subject improper and unpalatable, but the director of *V* was evidently a man who saw no point in half-heartedly dipping into bad taste when it was possible to have a dmaned good wallow in it. In a crescendo of crassness which may be unequalled on the screen, he took the famous scene

from *Alien*, changed John Hurt into a reptile-impregnated woman, and treated us to the spectacle of a mini-lizard popping up – hissing and snarling – out of her Caesarian section.

I’m told that *V* is to be followed by a 26-part sequel. If that is the case I may have to stop describing myself as a science fiction writer and claim a trade which is more socially acceptable. Traffic warden, perhaps. Or slum landlord.

In the meantime, to prove that I am one of the privileged who saw the first series, I am assiduously practising my V-sign. ■

Bob Shaw is a respected science fiction novelist whose best-known books include Other Days, Other Eyes (1972), A Wreath of Stars (1976) and Vertigo (1978).



V
 “Genuine moments of invention.”
 A Starburst TV Review
 by Richard Holliss

America loves tv mini-series, or so it seems. Generally I dislike them so found myself tuning into the first episode of *V* with some trepidation. But over the following days I became so hooked on the show that I didn’t dare risk missing a single episode. *V* had genuine moments of invention. Its characters came across as real flesh and blood, not comic strip stereotypes prevalent in so many sf series. I liked it as much as I had enjoyed the first series of BBC’s *Survivors* by Terry Nation. Nation’s strong feeling for the “indomitable human spirit” was easily shared by *V*’s writer and producer Kenneth Johnson.

The series’ use of sub-plots, showcased the political as well as physical war between man and the visitors. On one hand we had the tv reporter Mike Donovan (Marc Singer) and his group of resistance fighters, led by Juliet Parrish (Faye Grant). In opposition we found the evil Diana (Jane Badler), Steven (Andrew Prine) and Earth recruit Danny (David Packer). Though the 1984 updating of the holocaust story bordered on the heavy handed side, the fate the aliens plan for the inhabitants of Earth (the aliens herded the peoples of Earth into giant processing plants, turning them into food) was genuinely chilling.

Excellent too was the clever parody of the power of propaganda. A lot of Earth people believed that the visitors came in peace and meant no harm. Donovan’s mother was one such person, and some, like Daniel Bernstein, even betrayed their own families. But we had seen the grotesque side of the aliens and we also knew the fate of these blind individuals would be sealed.

As Los Angeles became the microcosm of the World’s problems, the heroes of the West Coast became leaders in the decisive battle against the invaders. One character that made the series even more enjoyable was the cold calculating Diana, a woman whose interest in torture made her a terrifying adversary. Her two scenes with Pamela (Sarah Douglas), another of the coldly attractive aliens, was a sheer delight in bitchiness, better than any of the lip gloss queens of *Dallas* or *Dynasty*.

Some of the special effects were quite startling, the shuttle craft scenes expertly handled. The producers included occasional establishing shots of alien shuttles flying across the rooftops of ordinary suburban streets with no apparent motive at that point in the story. This showed the extent to which the aliens had integrated with Earth society. Later in the story less sequences of the spaceships were used with the exception of the excellent matte painting of one hovering above the pumping station. When rebels destroy the base it’s the Universal film *Earthquake* (1974) that provides the necessary stock footage to show the scenes of destruction.

V had its faults, of course. Technical glitches like the continual appearance of the camera boom and the top of the camera hood jutting into the picture every now and again were irritating. Plotwise, it was the illogical refining of the chemical that finally kills the visitors. There was just too much of it at the rebels’ disposal. But even silly sequences such as the birth of the alien baby were still handled with some daring, and again our sympathy was extended towards the obviously fake looking gremlin, which looked more dead when it was supposed to be alive, than the lizards in the scientists’ glass cases.

But for all this, *V* was great entertainment and very exciting viewing. What we don’t want is a long running series. It’s too good an idea to throw away on a tedious *Mission Impossible* vs *The Invaders* format. ■



Top right: Marc Singer as Mike Donovan and Faye Grant as Juliet Parrish, the heads of the rebel alliance. Above: Jane Badler as the evil and perverted alien, Diana.