

New series à la Wells

By MARK DILLON

Remember *V*, that NBC science fiction mini-series from a few years back that had everybody tuning in to see how the world would survive an alien invasion? Well, Toronto-based Triumph Productions, producer Greg Strangis, and director Chris Chilver hope they have a similar hit north of the border with *The War of the Worlds*.

In 1953, sci-fi legend George Pal produced a film of the same name, based on the H.G. Wells story about a Martian attack on Earth. It was a remarkable film, setting new standards for special effects, and it had a brilliant, low-key ending.

The new *War of the Worlds* has the scientist son of characters from the original film discovering that the Martians — believed long dead — have actually been in a state of suspended animation for the past 35 years. Through a bizarre set of circumstances they are awoken, and go out on an earthling hunt.

You must hand it to Triumph. On a budget far lower than the minimum needed to make such a project in the States, it has made a TV-movie that looks slick, and that's the key to getting something sold in the US for prime time — it must look good.

The quality of the film, however, is another matter.

Right now, the future of Strangis' project is uncertain: Paramount Pictures has picked it up, so it will get airtime in the States, and it will probably be shown by either the CBC or CTV in coming months. The episode shown at the preview, "The Resurrection," seems to be a pilot; if it makes any kind of dent with viewers it can become a regular series or at least a mini-series.

Unfortunately, upon viewing the first episode, that looks rather doubtful. Of course, we would all like to see the Canadian film industry do well, but if patriotism is not enough to sell you on a film — and it's not enough for me — you probably won't enjoy *War of the Worlds*.

The film has a lot of problems. The story is rather uninvolved fare. Why they would want to make a sequel to a film that had ended so satisfactorily remains a mystery. We've seen the whole thing before anyway, whether in *V*, *The Thing*, *Hangar 18*, or countless others, and the story is told with a shoddy narrative that confuses and bores the viewer.

The script, by Strangis himself, could use some tightening. The protagonists aren't appealing — the kiss of death to a TV series.

Accompanying our scientist in the battle to stop the Martians is a divorced female scientist (we are to suppose there will be future romantic sparks between them), an Amerind Lieutenant Colonel, and a black wheelchair-bound computer expert.

Performances are weak, especially by the two leads, but it's not as though the material they had to work with was much good anyway. The audience broke into laughter at several unintentionally funny moments, but that is representative of the quality we're accustomed to on television; on the tube, *War of the Worlds* will probably seem average TV fare. However, our preview was a movie screen, for the large audience, and it didn't stand up at all.

The audience did applaud one scene, though — an action sequence in which the aliens first clash with the army. The scene is excitingly directed, and the special effects, although not revelatory, are of high calibre.

It was the highlight of an otherwise humdrum show.

If you're a staunch supporter of things Canadian, an SF junkie, or someone desperate for any form of new entertainment, watch *War of the Worlds* when it comes on the tube. Otherwise, those *Cheers* reruns are looking good.

Deceive the senses in *Fastyngange*

By HOWARD KAMAN

"*Fastyngange* is, if it must be defined, a story about the betrayal of the senses. It is about the victory over the tyranny of common sense."

This is how Tim Wynne-Jones describes his latest work of fiction. The novel follows Alexis Forgeben as she travels to England to sort out her troubled life and recent divorce. While touring the countryside she stumbles upon *Fastyngange*, a dilapidated castle, and curiosity drives her to venture inside. As she encounters the castle's unusual master — a deep shaft in the masonry — Alexis begins to understand the odd circumstances surrounding her separation from her husband.

If all this sounds the slightest bit bizarre, that's because it is. *Fastyngange* does not easily categorize itself. It is neither a fantasy, mystery, romance or suspense novel, but contains elements of all these genres.

"I avoid categorization at my peril," says Wynne-Jones. "I want to catch readers off guard."

This he does with ease — within the first 10 pages, the main concept of *Fastyngange* held me in its grasp. The idea of a shaft (or oubliette, as it's referred to in the book) as a narrative device allows for all sorts of imaginative possibilities.

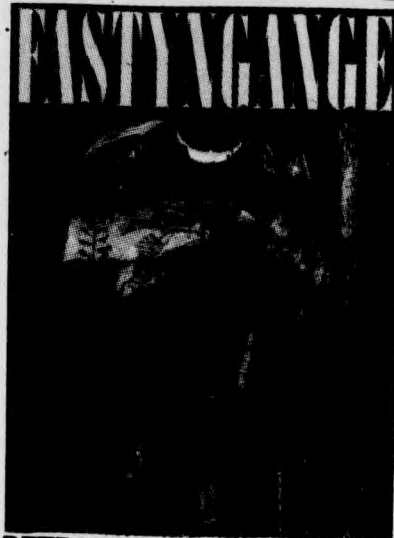
The oubliette which rules the castle is a dungeon, a nothingness which helps Alexis understand her puzzling life. Wynne-Jones explained that the idea for the hole came from several sources.

"I saw the thought of meeting your father in a hole," he said, as he told me the story of a friend's childhood experience of seeing his father for the first time in an underground jail cell in Leningrad.

The author also explained the origin of the novel's unusual title.

Fastyngange is an Anglo-Saxon word which means 'the beginning of the fast.' I made it into a place that became a metaphor for the place that one fasts. I don't mean fast just in the sense that one stops eating, but that whole period of cleansing and transformation. When you fast you are transformed. Lack of food changes you. It mentally puts you in a receptive situation for change, and that's a lot of what the book is about."

Change is what fascinates Tim Wynne-Jones. Born in England in 1948, he has occupied many fields of endeavour. Originally a visual artist, he has worked as an actor, painter, designer, and even spent a short while in a rock band. He became interested in writing while studying at York. Since graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1979,



BETRAYAL: Tim Wynne-Jones' *Fastyngange*.

he has pursued his career as a writer to the fullest.

His first book, *Odd's End*, won the Seal First Novel Contest, and he has written two (including *Fastyngange*) since. He has also published several books for children. With his latest work, he blends elements from many genres to create a novel which is challenging to read, as it is not easily pigeon-holed into a particular style of writing. The book itself is the "betrayal of the senses," that Wynne-Jones speaks of. *Fastyn-*

gange forces the reader to look beyond the common sense of genre fiction.

"I think our senses betray us every day," he explains. "We see something happening and we interpret it without knowing all the facts." We all misinterpret events, just as Alexis is confused by her marriage and divorce. In having her problems sorted out by an oubliette, a hole, she defies all notions of common sense. A hole is a space, an area filled with nothingness. If a hole is an empty space it cannot, in our understanding, do anything, because of its physical nature. But in the oubliette, something is there. Our senses have been deceived and betrayed. Through the use of concepts that are the reverse of what we're used to, Wynne-Jones absorbs the reader into the world of his characters, where there is, as he puts it, "victory over the tyranny of common sense."

In the world of *Fastyngange*, nothing is as it seems. Common sense doesn't solve anything, because nothing is common. And so should things be this way, for sometimes we must look beyond what is immediately visible. We have to dig deeper to create our own hole in which to find answers. This lesson is what *Fastyngange* teaches us, and it does so in a wonderful way.

