

THEY'RE HERE!



The *Invaders* first landed on Earth just over 50 years ago. It had only been 20 years since pilot Kenneth Arnold caused a sensation with his June 1947 claim to have seen 'flying saucers' above the Pacific Northwest of the US. Now, every week on American television, aliens from a dying world set out to make Earth their new home.

Only one man stood in their way: David Vincent, architect. It was up to him to convince a disbelieving world not only that the aliens were already here, but that they had taken human form and had begun to infiltrate society...

The 'saga sell' at the top of each episode of *The Invaders* set the scene perfectly, with an ominous voice-over narrating images of Vincent's late night first encounter with the alien saucer, followed by an eerie theme tune from Dominic Frontiere (*The Outer Limits*).

Each episode would see Vincent - played by Roy Thinnes - uncover the alien presence on Earth, often at a military or research facility or other isolated community, attempt to raise the alarm, and then face the prospect of tackling the aliens alone, or with the help of that episode's guest star, or battling against human collaborators (in episodes like 'Vikor', 'The Ivy Curtain', and 'The Watchers'). So concerned was he with tackling the aliens, David Vincent did very little architecting.

STIFF LITTLE FINGERS

The Invaders ran for two seasons across 1967 and 1968, and despite being almost as formulaic as all other Quinn Martin productions that preceded it (*The Fugitive*, *The F.B.I.*), there's something eerie about this show that holds the viewer's attention, even to this day. The strange alien infiltrators - only recognizable thanks to a defect in their pinkie fingers (where UK punk band Stiff Little Fingers got their name), and with a tendency to vanish in a flare of red light when 'killed' - could be all around us at any moment. The background to the aliens was deliberately left unstated, with their planet or species unnamed, allowing the viewers' imaginations to do the work.

Leading man Roy Thinnes (who was paid \$7,500 per week) had been a frequent American television guest star (on shows like *The Untouchables*, *The Eleventh Hour*, and *The Reporter*, and as a two-year series regular on *General Hospital*), so was a familiar face, but had never successfully led his own show before. 'I was very cautious about doing *The Invaders*,' Thinnes said in the 1990s, 'because I always felt that if science fiction wasn't done well, it was embarrassing. (We had) good writers. I was never disappointed, and that's why the show holds up.'

SOLO QUEST

The Invaders was a replacement for the Quinn Martin-produced *The Fugitive*, which ended in August 1967 with a two-part finale that saw Dr. Richard Kimble (David Janssen) unravel the mystery of the one-armed man and the murder of his wife. Larry Cohen (later the director of the 1982 cult classic *Q: The Winged Serpent*) created the series, drawing inspiration from 'alien doppelganger' movies *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Enemy From Space* (1957, the American release title for *Quatermass 2*, the Hammer movie based on the British 1950s' TV serial). Cohen also referred to several 'man on the run' Alfred Hitchcock movies as being inspirations, among them *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Saboteur* (1942), and *North by Northwest* (1959).

'ABC invited me to come in and pitch some ideas,' recalled Cohen in a book-length interview with Michael Doyle. 'In those movies, it was always difficult to distinguish the humans from the aliens, and that was a scary idea.'

Cohen needed a justification for his hero to move from town to town, never going to the authorities, so he conceived of loner Vincent and his solo quest to thwart the alien menace. 'ABC went for the idea immediately,' said Cohen. '*The Invaders* was originally envisioned to be two half-hour shows a week (like the 1960s *Adam West Batman*), a serial with dramatic cliffhangers. Instead, they decided on a regular one hour show and brought in Quinn Martin's company to produce it.'

Cohen supplied executive producer Quinn Martin with over a dozen possible storylines for individual episodes of *The Invaders*, most used in 1967's 17-episode first season, although he didn't directly script any. Anthony Wilson wrote '*Beachhead*' - the impressive pilot, that set the scene for the series - and *The Fugitive*'s Alan A. Armer produced.

'The major thing that the show had going for it,' said Armer, 'is the fact that we are all a little bit paranoid. That's what all real heroes are, if you look at the great myths and legends. Frequently it is one person fighting society, fighting the government, fighting (against) an invisible force... We all relate to that.'

THE INVADERS

50 years on from its debut, *The Invaders* still packs a punch. Eerie and ominous, the series made a star of Roy Thinnes and paved the way for the likes of *The X-Files*. Brian J. Robb examines the creation of a landmark science fiction show.

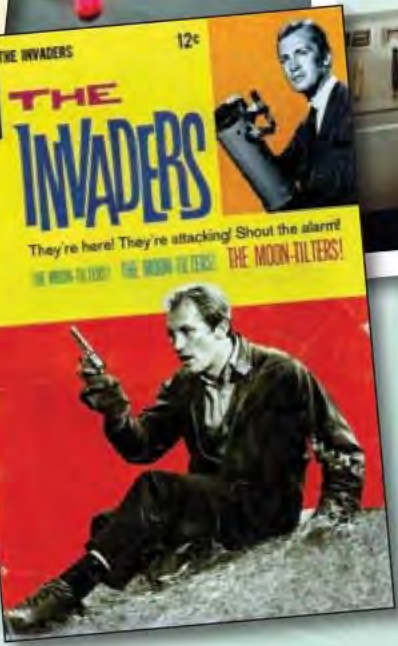


This image: Roy Thinnes as David Vincent, tackling the illegal alien problem head on!

Opposite: Roy in scenes from *The Invaders* episodes 'Beachhead' (above, with Diane Baker) and 'Counterattack' (below with Ahna Capri), plus some tasty merchandise that we hope the aliens got a cut of the profits for



This image: The classic image of a flying saucer was utilised for the series, and on the left David Vincent (Roy Thinnes) gets to look inside one



FAN FAVOURITE EPISODES

The Invaders -the top ten episodes according to the show's fans!

- 1: Storm:** David Vincent is contacted by a meteorologist to help investigate the suspicious nature of a hurricane along the Eastern U.S. coast.
- 2: The Ivy Curtain:** Vincent discovers that a school in New Mexico is really a front for an alien indoctrination centre with some otherworldly students.
- 3: Wall of Crystal:** David's brother, who also thinks he is crazy, is kidnapped by the aliens who intend to destroy the oxygen in our planet's air.
- 4: The Innocent:** An alien (Michael Rennie) captures Vincent and convinces him he'll be taken to a paradise as proof of the invaders' peaceful treatment. The invaders conspire to destroy both of them.
- 5: Valley of the Shadow:** After an alien is captured in a small town, Vincent warns the townspeople, who assume that their captive is a madman.
- 6: Dark Outpost:** While investigating the invaders' susceptibility to minor human ailments, David Vincent is unknowingly taken aboard an alien spacecraft.
- 7: The Enemy:** Despite Vincent's warnings, a nurse tries to help an injured alien survivor of a saucer crash.
- 8: The Watchers:** A hysterical hotel manager tells Vincent that he fears aliens are taking over his hotel.
- 9: The Saucer:** Vincent battles, then destroys an alien guard and captures one of their spacecraft.
- 10: The Organization:** Vincent joins forces with the mob when the aliens inadvertently take their illegal shipment of drugs.

publish comics based upon *Star Trek*) also issued a comic book version of the show.

That was it for *The Invaders*, apart from occasional re-runs (BBC2 in the UK repeated the series periodically from the mid-1980s through to the early-1990s). The premise was revived in 1995 for a disappointing two-part television mini-series starring Scott Bakula (*Quantum Leap*, *Enterprise*) as the new investigator of the alien threat. At the star of the second episode Roy Thinnes appeared in a brief three-minute cameo as David Vincent, effectively passing the torch to Bakula's Nolan Wood. Despite that, the new mini-series featured little continuity with the original show.

At its best, the original show had anticipated the 1990s alien-battling series like *The X-Files* and *Dark Skies*, while this mini-series was simply a poor imitation. In an homage to the show, *The X-Files* featured Thinnes in a pivotal role at the end of the third season.

Looking back on the series, Larry Cohen laments his lack of creative control - although the show's creator, he had not been involved in its production. 'I would have insisted there be fewer invaders, that's for sure,' he says. 'Every other person on the show seemed to be an alien! Roy Thinnes was knocking them off left and right, (so) there was no real suspense or fear. The invaders were so vulnerable to Vincent, it negated the threat. They just went 'poof' and they were gone! The infiltration idea was intended to generate paranoia and suspicion. That was part of the fun. Ultimately, *The Invaders* was executed with a lack of imagination.'

replacing Communists with aliens. In the second season episode 'The Trial', an alien is even referred to as 'a card-carrying member from outer space'.

'*The Invaders* was definitely a show of its era,' noted Cohen. 'It related to the fraught times we were living in and the paranoia about Communist infiltration in America. It was this atmosphere that made me want to write *The Invaders*, (as) a way to explore the political climate. I thought the subtext was obvious, but to some people involved with the show it clearly wasn't. They didn't understand any of that!'

The Invaders concluded at the end of the extended 26-episode second season without a proper wrap up, unlike Quinn Martin's previous show *The Fugitive*. In a kind of victory, the final instalment, 'Inquisition,' does see Vincent achieve one of his aims by persuading an influential figure, an assistant to the Attorney General, that the alien threat is real. The invaders themselves are repulsed, temporarily at least, and the closing narration on the final episode suggests that when they return Vincent will no longer be operating against them alone - he now has powerful allies.

Unfortunately, there would be no third season that would see the aliens face such an organised counter-attack. The high ratings of the first season had all but collapsed during year two, so a disappointed ABC pulled the plug on *The Invaders* after 43 variable episodes. Cohen, having moved onto pastures new by then, learned about the cancellation in the Hollywood trade papers: 'I was so removed from the show at that point; I really had nothing to do with it by the time it was cancelled. As the show progressed I tried to give them some advice on where I thought the show was going wrong, (but) they weren't interested. I wanted to make my own movies; television was too difficult and restricting...'

The open-ended nature of the conclusion left the way clear for future follow-ups. A series of nine pulp novels inspired by *The Invaders* appeared between 1967 and 1969, with the authors including acclaimed science fiction novelist Keith Laumer (who also wrote a trio of novelizations of classic British telefantasy series *The Avengers*). Gold Key Comics (the first to

in the atmospheric opening episode. Kids across America would later build their own *Invaders* saucers from Aurora model kits, and eventually got a closer look inside the ship in the early second season episode, 'The Saucer'.

'*Beachhead*' established Vincent and his ongoing quest. Each episode would unfold across four 'acts' (labelled on screen) and conclude with an 'epilogue' wrapping things up.

Quinn Martin Productions was a television factory, producing a high quality shot-on-location product with little variation. Martin was a control freak who oversaw every aspect of production, but believed in firmly following a formula. As a result of this, there was little episode-to-episode continuity (as was the style with most 1960s TV shows), although late in the second season Vincent does attract a group of 'believers', led by industrialist Edgar Scoville

(played by Kent Smith), in one of the series' best episodes (unsurprisingly entitled 'The Believers').

More often, though, the series played out like a formulaic anthology show, with Vincent and the aliens as the only continuing factors. Despite a distinct lack of humour (a frequent Quinn Martin trait), *The Invaders* was a hit, at least at first. The show was not as weird as *The Twilight Zone* or *The*

Outer Limits, though it occasionally hinted at elements of both, but neither was it as childish as Irwin Allen shows like *Lost in Space* or *Land of the Giants* tended to be. Both in production and on screen, *The Invaders* was a serious business.

Guest stars across the two seasons included such television or movie faces and soon-to-be-stars as Susan Strasberg, *Forbidden Planet*'s Anne Francis, Barbara Hershey (*The Entity*), Jack Lord (*Hawaii Five-O*), Peter Graves (*Mission: Impossible*), Roddy McDowall (*Planet of the Apes*), Ed Asner (*Lou Grant*), Gene Hackman, Burgess Meredith, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*'s Michael Rennie (as an alien leader, in the episode 'The Innocent'), and *Star Trek*'s William Windom. Quinn Martin paid over the odds for his episodic guest stars, and so was able to attract some big names.

PARANOID POLITICS

Although the 'red scare' of the 1940s and 1950s was in the past, its effects lingered on into the 1960s with some of those in Hollywood who'd been blacklisted as suspected Communists only beginning to get proper credit for work completed under fake names (screenwriter Dalton Trumbo was credited on 1960's *Spartacus* after being blacklisted for almost 15 years). It was easy to see the paranoia of *The Invaders* - the inability to superficially tell the difference between the infiltrating aliens and humans - as an analogy to the effects of the cold war between the US and Russia.

Cohen's movie inspirations had themselves been disguised reactions to the McCarthy era, and in a DVD audio commentary for the episode 'The Innocent', Cohen admitted to essentially

Top: Barbara Luna, Joseph Campanella, Allen Emerson and Carlos Romero in the 'Storm' episode
Above: Roy Thinnes with Carol Lynley in 'The Believers'
Above right: One of *The Invaders* goes 'poof', and we mean that in a politically correct fashion

