

NAZI LIZARDS FROM OUTER SPACE:
THE POLITICS, LITERATURE, AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF KENNETH
JOHNSON'S V

by

Dan Copp

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

Middle Tennessee State University
August 2015

Thesis Committee:
Dr. David Lavery, Chair
Dr. Mischa Renfroe, Reader

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Marcia, whose encouragement inspired me to persevere until the end.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my parents for their unyielding support and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Rhonda McDaniel for allowing me to squeeze into her Research and Bibliography class in the eleventh hour and for inspiring me to endure these trying years of graduate school by providing me with the foundation to effectively research and write this thesis. Next, I would like to thank the late Dr. John Clements, whose encyclopedic literary acumen and passion for the printed word inspired me to pursue English at Indiana State University all those years ago. I would also like to thank Dr. David Lavery for his unflagging support and suggestions that enabled this project to evolve from a class term paper to a nearly one-hundred-page master's thesis. Thank you, also, to Dr. Mischa Renfroe for her invaluable input and to Luke Patton for his creative insight. Finally, I would like to thank Kenneth Johnson for taking the time to correspond with me and for bringing so many memorable creations to life which helped legitimized science fiction television for future generations.

ABSTRACT

When Kenneth Johnson's NBC science fiction miniseries *V* premiered on May 1, 1983, it took America by storm. The two-part alien invasion epic netted forty percent of the viewing audience; more than eighty million households tuned in to see Earth besieged by a fleet of three-mile-wide flying saucers inhabited by legions of power-hungry reptilian invaders. The stellar ratings for *V* were also accompanied by critical praise that still resonates thirty years later. In 2005, *Entertainment Weekly* ranked *V* as one of the ten best miniseries on DVD and named it as one of the genre's most endearing franchises. On the surface, *V* is an alien invasion piece riddled with science fiction clichés. But behind the laser pistols, anthropomorphic lizards, and flying saucers dwells a compelling story about power, totalitarianism, and resistance inspired by both classic literature and the events of human history. In 2009, producer Scott Peters rebooted *V* on ABC hoping to rekindle the franchise's 1980s glory. Despite a robust premiere, the *V* remake hemorrhaged ratings as the season progressed, and critical reaction for the new show was largely negative. Both versions of *V* were products of their respective times, but the original was inspired by classic works by the likes of Sinclair Lewis and Leo Tolstoy. Johnson's predilection for literature and history helped give his telling of *V* a sense of heart and depth that the contemporary version sorely lacked.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: THE ORIGINAL MINISERIES	13
Kenneth Johnson and Classic Literature.....	13
Lizards in Jackboots.....	24
CHAPTER TWO: <i>V</i> GOES PRIMETIME (1984-1985)	39
The Not-So Final Battle.....	40
<i>V</i> 's Short-Lived <i>Dynasty</i>	49
CHAPTER THREE: TERRORISTS FROM OUTER SPACE	63
<i>V</i> in a Post-9/11 World	64
Critical Reaction	79
CONCLUSION: JOHNSON'S LEGACY	86
WORKS CITED	96

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1983, my second-grade classmates and I bent the rules in the school cafeteria by smuggling our plastic sandwich bags into recess instead of throwing them away as the lunch supervisors had commanded. While our older peers played kickball in the adjacent field, the playground area had been adopted as the setting for our imaginative interstellar space battles, car chases, police shootouts, or choreographed lightsaber duels. Those of us who were lucky enough to own toy laser guns were the envy of our peers while most of us just used sticks or whatever refuse we could find to serve as our props of choice. On some days, these discarded Coca-Cola cans or rocks would become metaphorical weapons in our colorful arsenal such as ninja stars or ticking time bombs that had to be diffused. While most recesses that year were dedicated to playing G.I. Joe, Star Wars, or the Gobots, that particular spring was reserved to reenact a new science fiction miniseries that had aired on TV in May that took many of our young imaginations by storm.

On the night of May 2, 1983, millions of viewers tuned to their respective NBC affiliates to behold a fleet of fifty saucer-shaped spacecraft descend on Earth and fan out across major metropolitan cities all over the world during the inaugural episode of the two-part science fiction miniseries *V*. From a marketing standpoint, it was a fertile climate for science fiction; George Lucas's landmark *Star Wars* trilogy was captivating audiences around the globe, and fans were eagerly anticipating the release of that saga's third entry, *Return of the Jedi*, a mere twenty-three days following the premiere of *V*. *Star Wars* had made science fiction fun again by paring the dystopian cynicism exhibited in films like *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973) and *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968), and the public opened their wallets enthusiastically at the box office. The entertainment industry had been capitalizing on the space opera trend by

cranking out a slew of second-rate *Star Wars* clones such as *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978), *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (NBC, 1978), *The Black Hole* (Gary Nelson, 1979), *Galactica 1980* (ABC, 1979), *Starcrash* (Luigi Cozzi, 1978), and *Krull* (Peter Yates, 1983). *V* was NBC's opportunity to cash in on the new space race, and their \$13 million investment paid off in full. Kenneth Johnson's two hundred-minute space opera drew more than forty percent of the viewing television audience and salvaged the network's floundering prime-time track record in 1983 (Bedell).

Ostensibly, *V*'s plot is fairly straight-forward and derivative of several other science fiction films such as George Pal's *War of the Worlds* (Bryon Haskin, 1953) and *Earth Vs. the Flying Saucers* (Fred F. Sears, 1956). In *V*, Earth is invaded by an armada of fifty massive flying saucers inhabited by bipedal reptilians deceptively encased in faux human skins. Eventually several human scientists uncover the aliens' terrible secret and learn to their horror that their interstellar visitors plan to purloin Earth's water supply and harvest human beings for food. A war between human and alien ensues, setting the stage for a climactic showdown in the tradition of the Rebel Alliance's final stand against the tyrannical Empire in *Star Wars*.

The presence of fork-tongued reptilian invaders from outer space toting laser pistols on primetime television stoked our young imaginations that spring, and for several days following the miniseries's premiere, we reenacted the human-alien entanglements that transpired in *V* on the school playground. Since the Visitors (as the invaders on *V* are coined) don artificial human skins to hide their grotesque reptilian natures from the unsuspecting populace, those of us pretending to be the aliens used the plastic sandwich bags smuggled out of the cafeteria on our faces to emulate the rubber-like masks the extraterrestrials wore on television, which tore away like melted pizza cheese. We ripped one another's plastic sandwich bags from our faces with

glee, almost seeing the red-eyed reptilian monsters underneath, spewing imaginary venom and hissing like rampaging basilisks as the “human” characters fanned out across the schoolyard in feigned terror. Those of us conscripted to play the “good guys” were heavily outnumbered by the sandwich bag-faced alien actors because it was simply more fun as a kid to play a Visitor. But what our elementary brains didn’t realize then was that Johnson’s landmark miniseries was a lot more than colorful battles and spaceships.

A year later NBC released a three-part sequel to their hit science fiction miniseries entitled *V: The Final Battle*. This version contained even more action sequences than the original and didn’t involve Johnson, who left the project in an early stage due to creative differences. Like its predecessor, *V: The Final Battle* was a ratings triumph for NBC, and the network brass greenlit a weekly television series that commenced in the fall of 1984. At one million dollars an episode, *V: The Series* was the most expensive television show ever produced at the time (Thomas). Despite its exorbitant costs, the series (which also didn’t involve Johnson) was poorly received and was quietly cancelled in March 1985 due to a sharp ratings decline. As ratings for *V: The Series* plummeted, NBC attempted to coax Johnson to return to save the ailing franchise, but the creator adamantly refused and moved on to different projects such as *Alien Nation* (1989-1990). On the playground, our *V* games were eventually replaced by *Transformers* or *Ghostbusters* reenactments, and *V* slipped away from pop cultural consciousness for more than twenty years.

However, the cancellation of *V: The Series* in 1985 did not spell the end to the interstellar reptilian invaders; in 2009, ABC resurrected the dormant sci-fi franchise in the form of a weekly one-hour television drama that lasted for two seasons. Although Johnson received a “created by” credit, he was not involved in the production of the rebooted series, which aimed to duplicate the

success of Ronald D. Moore and David Eick's *Battlestar Galactica* remake on the Sci-Fi Channel. Much to the disappointment of ABC, viewer reaction was decidedly mixed for the new show, and *V* once again met its television demise in 2011 when the network opted not to renew it.

In anticipation of the new show, I re-watched the original *V* miniseries as well as the sequel and short-lived weekly 1980s series that followed. While immersing myself in childhood nostalgia, I was amazed at the subtext and multifaceted layers in the original miniseries. Although the plot of the film played out as I had fondly remembered it, there were elements within the script that went way over our childhood heads back in 1983: themes of fascism, totalitarianism, systematic oppression, rebellion, civil rights, and democracy. Instead of decimating famous landmarks or firebombing military installations like the pugnacious invaders in *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), the invaders in *V* initiate a more subtle and insidious approach in their conquest of Earth. Initially, the Visitors appear like innocuous intergalactic astronauts on an exploratory mission of peace. On the surface they look like us, speak our languages, and even assume easy-to-pronounce all-American names like Brian, John, Steven, William, and Diana. Using the news media as his primary source of public relations and communication to the outside world, the Visitor supreme commander, John (Richard Herd), assuages the frightened populace like a savvy politician with overtures of peace, claiming that he and his colleagues are in need of alloys native to Earth in order to synthesize a chemical that will save their home planet.

However, the Visitors' altruistic natures are only as deep as their false human skins. As members of the scientific community grow skeptical of the Visitors' true intentions, the aliens ingratiate themselves with the world's most powerful, elite, and influential population and

assume control of all major media outlets. In a preemptive strike against the increasingly suspicious scientists and physicians, the duplicitous Visitors manipulate lawmakers to pass harsh sanctions against biologists, chemists, geologists, or any other member of the scientific community that threatens to expose their true nature. As the miniseries unfolds, the Visitors consolidate their power by deploying jackbooted shock troopers to patrol neighborhood streets and arrest or detain scientists *en masse*, echoing the Nazi roundup of Jews prior to World War II such as the infamous Dzyatlava Massacre (Booker 91). In a plot twist that mirrors the 1966 *Twilight Zone* episode “To Serve Man,” it is revealed that the Visitors are actually bipedal reptilians in the guise of humans that plan to pillage Earth of its natural resources (primarily water) and harvest human beings for food. In order to accomplish their ominous mission, the Visitors insidiously wrest control of the government and begin to manipulate the populace to turn on itself by playing on humanity’s own tendencies toward prejudice and avarice. As America (and presumably the rest of the world) plunges deeper into a fascist dystopia, a band of resistance fighters—under the leadership of a young molecular biologist who evaded persecution—joins forces to overthrow their alien overlords and liberate the planet. This act of rebellion and resistance sets the stage for the remainder of the miniseries and its subsequent sequels and spinoffs, which I watched immediately afterward.

Much to my disappointment, *V: The Final Battle* and *V: The Series* felt like entirely different franchises. Although the ongoing war against the reptilian Visitors is still the main focus of their respective plots, the sequel and weekly series eschewed the emotional depth and sociopolitical themes that made Johnson’s original miniseries so relevant. *The Final Battle* merely glosses over the political themes explored by its predecessor and emphasizes laser battles and melodramatic plot twists such as the childbirth of a human-Visitor hybrid that later becomes

a messianic sorceress endowed with *deus ex machina* powers that save the world from annihilation. While the child in me smiled at the camp and laser gun-infused battle scenes inundating *The Final Battle*, the mature viewer in me sorely missed the complexity and emotional depth prevalent in the original. The tone of the subsequent weekly series was that of a dated prime time soap opera like *Dallas* (1978-1991), *Knots Landing* (1978-1993) and *Falcon Crest* (1981-1990), which were ratings juggernauts for CBS when *V: The Series* originally aired. In an attempt to attract primetime soap opera audiences, the weekly series featured an ensemble cast of disparate characters involved in parallel plots infused with melodrama, illicit romantic entanglements, tedious car chases, and episodic “battle of the week” storylines that alienated the original *V* fanbase.

When Scott Peters (*The 4400*) rebooted *V* for ABC in 2009, the reimagined show took a different approach to the alien invasion trope. Once again, the Earth’s skies are shadowed by a fleet of alien spaceships bearing passengers who bear nefarious designs for humanity’s future. Like its 1980s predecessor, *V* 2009 is also seasoned with political themes, although the political undertones are more subtle and less analogous to fascism. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 altered the way in which audiences perceived villainy, and these “sleeper cell” antagonists materialized on both the big and small screens. The 2009 update of *V* is more reminiscent of Moore’s acclaimed *Battlestar Galactica* reboot (2004-2008) in that it no longer depicts jackbooted alien phalanxes marching in unison on city streets; the reimagined invaders masquerade as plain-clothed civilians living amongst us and could literally be anyone, anywhere. Like John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) or Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), the alien menace in the reimagined *V* is clandestine and camouflaged, stimulating a heightened sense of paranoia.

However, despite its implementation of topical political themes, the rebooted *V* was another disappointment for the franchise. The new show was marred by convoluted writing, contrived science fiction clichés, and cartoony stock characters with little to no depth. Although the pilot garnered robust ratings, viewership for the *V* remake sharply declined as it progressed, and the show was ultimately cancelled in 2011. Politics played an instrumental role in both incarnations of *V*, but the two depictions of the alien invaders conveyed very different political methodologies that ultimately lead to the same megalomaniacal plan: world domination. Both versions of the show were reflections of the zeitgeists. The Cold War with the Soviet Union was still in full swing in 1983, and Russia's totalitarian practices were at the forefront of America's consciousness. The Soviet Union had recently invaded Afghanistan, and memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis still resonated in Baby Boomers' minds. The fascist and authoritarian rule of the Visitors is reminiscent of Stalinist Russia and the countries it subjugated such as Latvia and Estonia. On the other hand, the reimagined *V* reflects the paranoia and uncertainty of the post-9/11 world in which terrorist sleeper cells could be anywhere at any time. Despite being products of their respective political climates, the original *V* was lauded as a critical and ratings triumph, while its predecessor was dismissed as an abject failure. The 1980s *V* series was also a television flop, and although *The Final Battle* yielded healthy ratings and relatively positive reviews, it too lacked the gusto of the first miniseries. The original *V* production team had something in its arsenal that its successors lacked: Kenneth Johnson.

Born on October 26, 1942, Johnson created a host of popular American television dramas throughout the 1970s and 1980s including *The Bionic Woman* (1976-78), *The Incredible Hulk* (1977-82), and *Alien Nation* (1989-90). The Pine Bluff, Arkansas, native also directed several theatrical films such as *Short Circuit 2* (1989) and *Steel* (1997), although his success was mainly

rooted in television. What distinguished Johnson from other Hollywood directors and writers is his propensity for classic literature. While studying drama at Carnegie-Mellon University, Johnson was immersed in the works of literary greats in an academic environment that “stressed a deep and solid study of theatrical literature from the ancients up through contemporary classics” (On the Shoulders of Giants). After college, Johnson continued to study vintage literary works including poetry by Virgil, Homer, and Milton and prose by Charles Dickens. Johnson’s early exposure to classic literature gave him a solid foundation as a writer and greatly influenced his own work. For example, when he created *The Bionic Woman*, he viewed the titular character played by Lindsay Wagner as a modern version of one of the Roman or Greek gods he had read about. Johnson was even congratulated by the head of the psychology department at Boston University for creating the archetype of the twentieth century demigoddess (On the Shoulders of Giants). When Universal approached him to bring Marvel’s Incredible Hulk to the small screen, he had been reading Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables* and saw a striking parallel between the Hulk and Jean Valjean as an isolated and lonely fugitive with a dark secret. Johnson also incorporated other literary themes-- such as the consequences of hubris exhibited in Robert Lewis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*-- into his interpretation of iconic Marvel superhero, and the show flourished for five seasons on CBS.

The original *V* was also shaped by Johnson’s astute literary acumen. After Johnson read the 1935 satirical Sinclair Lewis novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, he was inspired to create an updated film adaptation that encapsulated the novel’s cautionary political themes for a contemporary audience. Lewis’s novel depicts the imagined rise of fascism in America during the 1930s and the systematic oppression that followed in its wake. Initially, the original *V*

contained no hint of aliens, space, flying saucers, or any other science fiction convention. Much like *It Can't Happen Here*, Johnson's inaugural draft for *V* was a gritty political drama that chronicled the rise of a totalitarian state in America during the 1980s and showed how an ensemble cast of characters overcame it. Since the cast for the project was so vast, Johnson used Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as an inspiration for managing his own disparate army of characters and eventually tied them together in a taut narrative tapestry. In the script, we are introduced to individuals from different walks of life who are brought together to fight a common cause. Instead of the Napoleonic conquest of Czarist Russia vividly described in Tolstoy's opus, Johnson uses an alien invasion of the earth as the impetus that unites his characters. After completing the script, Johnson shopped his product around Hollywood but encountered little interest from producers and network executives who felt it was too political and polemic for average television audiences.

When Johnson brought his script to then-NBC president Brandon Tartikoff, the young television executive suggested that the story's villains be changed to aliens as means to capitalize on the recent box office science fiction boom ignited by *Star Wars* in 1977 and *The Empire Strikes Back* in 1980 in order to draw a broader audience. Having already produced *The Incredible Hulk* and *The Bionic Woman*, Johnson was reluctant to pursue yet another science fiction venture. He didn't want his stirring political allegory to become yet another dumbed-down *Star Wars* knockoff. However, the more Johnson ruminated on the premise, the more potential he realized it contained. He aimed to introduce his updated version of Lewis's novel to a new generation by essentially disguising it as a science fiction film. The science fiction tropes in *V* would serve merely as allegory. So Johnson revised his political thriller into a four-hour science fiction epic; his slimy right-winged antagonists became slimy reptilian alien invaders,

and the resistance members became scientists-at-arms rather than soldiers-at-arms. Despite the revisions made to the teleplay, Johnson crafted his prose carefully to ensure his central theme would not be compromised: ultimate power both creates corrupt villains and inspires heroes. This includes not only the seemingly omnipotent power of the Visitor garrison, but the power that several sundry human characters acquire by colluding with their alien occupiers, much like the Vichy French did with the Germans in World War II, and the inner strength and fortitude an average person finds when he or she is pushed into feats of heroism like the biologist-turned-leader of the human resistance, Juliet Parrish (Simpson).

Although the premise of *V* may sound like a compendium of campy sci-fi clichés, it stands above mindless creature features due to its creator's proclivity for classic literature and well-rounded storytelling. Like the Visitors who look human but are really reptilian predators, Johnson's miniseries is deceiving at first glance because it *appears* like traditional science fiction fare but is in fact an incognito socio-political allegory with bold thematic underpinnings. For example, the aliens' weaponry was modeled after German Luger pistols, their uniforms were designed to channel those worn by the German *Wehrmacht* in the 1940s, and their flag is a variation of the Nazi swastika. The evil Visitor second-in-command, Diana (Jane Badler), like the notorious Nazi surgeon Josef Mengele, conducts sadistic medical experiments on human captives (Simpson). One of the more memorable characters in the original *V* is a Holocaust survivor named Abraham Bernstein (Leonardo Cimino) who makes several references to the atrocities he witnessed during the Second World War and the parallels between the Visitors and Nazi Germany.

When Johnson abandoned the *V* franchise following a creative dispute with NBC, the subsequent sequel and weekly series became the very antithesis of his original vision: a dumbed-

down campy sci-fi yarn with little to no character development, sophistication, or original thought. What made Johnson's original *V* unique from other contemporary science fiction films and television programs was its incorporation of complex sociopolitical allegory amid the flying saucers, rodent-ingesting extraterrestrials, and laser gun blasts. In essence, the original *V* two-parter is a political commentary in the guise of a sci-fi film depicting the rise of fascism in America. But when Johnson left the project, the franchise simply devolved into a glib and shallow primetime soap opera with no substance. Peters attempted to rekindle the original *V*'s success in his 2009 reboot but was ultimately undermined by trite writing and cardboard characters. Although the *V* remake contains subtle references to topical political issues in order to stay relevant (e.g., universal health care and terrorism), the show's inconsistent pacing, plot holes, and redundant sci-fi clichés expedited its cancellation in 2011.

This thesis will examine Johnson's original *V* miniseries and analyze how it has withstood the test of time and why other attempts to remake or reboot the series have invariably failed. It will also consider the other works of Kenneth Johnson—such as *The Bionic Woman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Alien Nation*—to explore how his early exposure to classic literature helped fuel his creative process. I contend that the classic literary themes that manifest in Johnson's writing have given his version of *V* a level of depth and sophistication that the sequels and reboots have never attained. In addition, Johnson based several of his characters on real historical figures, which gave his telling of *V* a sense of gritty realism that the remakes and sequels lack.

Chapter One will offer a thorough analysis of the original *V*—from its inception to completion—and demonstrate that the writings of Sinclair Lewis and Leo Tolstoy played an integral part in its genesis. Chapter Two will focus on *The Final Battle* and short-lived weekly

television series that followed in Johnson's wake. The second chapter will also discuss the significant decline in *V*'s quality and how the once flourishing franchise floundered and inevitably failed without Johnson's involvement. Chapter Three will examine the 2009 *V* reboot and why ABC's gamble to give the Visitors a post-9/11 makeover ultimately failed. The third chapter will also contend that by incorporating contemporary political themes for the sake of fomenting controversy, the reimagined *V* alienated viewers and soured fans of the original miniseries. In addition, this study will highlight Johnson's ongoing efforts to bring his version of *V* back from the dead and explain why the original miniseries remains an important piece of television history.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE ORIGINAL MINISERIES

“To the heroism of the Resistance Fighters—past, present, and future—
this work is respectfully dedicated.”

—Kenneth Johnson

In the spring of 1983, public bus stops and billboards across America began exhibiting propaganda-like posters of smiling uniformed officers extending their hands in friendship accompanied by verbiage that read: “We’re here to be your friends.” It was an early form of viral marketing long before the term *viral marketing* was a trend. The masterminds behind the World War II-style posters were NBC marketing executives who were promoting an ambitious four-hour science fiction miniseries called *V*. When *V* premiered on May 1, 1983, NBC’s unorthodox marketing gimmick paid off. The ambitious science fiction epic drew more than forty million viewers coupled with a forty share Nielsen rating and even beat the Olympics two-to-one (Baldwin).

Kenneth Johnson and Classic Literature

Kenneth Johnson, the creator of *V*, was at the pinnacle of his television prowess in the early 1980s. The multifaceted filmmaker had worked as a producer on *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-78) and eventually launched several successful television projects of his own prior to *V* including *The Bionic Woman* (1976-78) and *The Incredible Hulk* (1977-82). Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in October 26, 1942, Kenneth Culver Johnson grew up in the Washington, D.C. area and attended Sherwood High School in Sandy Spring, Maryland. He later received what he coined as a “classic education” from Carnegie Mellon University, where he was exposed to

numerous works of vintage literature ranging from Virgil to Charles Dickens before graduating in 1964 with a degree in drama. It was this immersion in literature that would inspire Johnson's writing for the entirety of his career. In an email interview conducted in the summer of 2013, Johnson informed me that the timelessness of the classics continues to inspire him today: "I think that the great classics always inspire us more than we realize," he wrote. "In addition to Tolstoy and Sinclair Lewis I would certainly count the spectrum of characters created by Dickens, the drama and poetry found in Melville and the depth of human insight of Joseph Conrad among my strongest influences. The fact that Conrad was writing in a second language always blows me away" (Johnson interview).

After working as a producer for several years in New York, Johnson relocated to Philadelphia and joined *The Mike Douglas Show* as a director and producer and, at the age of 24, became that show's executive producer. In the early 1970s, he moved to California and worked as a producer on several game shows such as *The Joker's Wild* and even produced the popular killer whale shows at SeaWorld. It was in California that Johnson reconnected with his former classmate Steven Bochco (the co-creator of *Hill Street Blues*, *L.A. Law*, *Doogie Howser, M.D.*, and *NYPD Blue*), who took the young producer under his wing and encouraged him to write. Johnson recalls his initial trepidation about writing in the essay "The Truth of Science Fiction":

When I first came to Hollywood in the early '70's, already having many credits as a producer and director, my college buddy Steven Bochco told me I could control my own destiny more if I began writing. I was resistant. Directing was easy for me, whereas writing was hard. But I tried, and discovered that I had some talent at it after all.

Johnson wisely heeded his colleague's advice and eventually joined the writing staff of the ABC hit drama *The Six Million Dollar Man*, which was the burgeoning auteur's first foray into science fiction. The Harve Bennett-produced drama was about an astronaut-turned-cyborg named Steve Austin (portrayed by Lee Majors) and his weekly episodic battles against injustice. After penning several *Six Million Dollar Man* teleplays, Johnson pitched an idea for an episode entitled "The Bionic Woman" that featured a female protagonist (played by Lindsay Wagner) with similar bionic surgical implants. This two-part episode was so well-received that it spawned a spinoff in 1976 of the same name. From there, Johnson's television career flourished, especially in the realm of science fiction (Shelton).

When Johnson first became involved with *The Six Million Dollar Man* franchise, he felt the series was stagnating and aimed to inject some humanity into the content to beef up the declining ratings. "When I joined *The Six Million Dollar Man* as writer/creator of Jaime Sommers, the bionic world was already created and rolling along, although the ratings were just middling," he wrote. "I felt part of the reason for that was that the show was too earnest and straightforward. What I felt was missing was a true sense of how I and most people would behave if we were bionic" (Truth of Science Fiction). So Johnson took advantage of the untapped potential of a human being with bionic strength and put his mechanized protagonist in everyday and relatable situations to better connect with larger audiences. Johnson writes:

Wouldn't we do personal tasks, like mowing the lawn, at bionic speed? Of course we would. And might our bionics occasionally backfire? If Steve Austin were using his bionic strength to pull out a massive root – and it suddenly snapped – he'd fly back and land flat on his ass. So I wrote that, but I was told, "You can't have the audience laughing at your hero." I pointed out that if our hero could also

laugh at himself it would humanize him and make the audience love him all the more. I stuck to my guns. To me that sort of thing was real and true – and it also injected into my script with the other key element of true life I felt was missing in the series – a sense of humor. In creating *The Bionic Woman* I took both of those ideas to heart and invested them in my screenplay. (Truth of Science Fiction)

Johnson's more grounded approach gave the *Six Million Dollar Man* franchise a fresh new awareness for audiences and helped catapult the show back into the top ten most-watched dramas for the first time since its inception. Johnson essentially humanized his characters so that they appealed to a broader demographic. His characters are flawed three-dimensional individuals who make mistakes, aren't perfect, and have a well-developed backstory that is relatable for common viewers.

Johnson's other inspiration for his approach to *The Bionic Woman* mythos stemmed from the classic literature that shaped him as a student at Carnegie Mellon. He saw striking parallels between the character of Jaime Sommers (the eponymous Bionic Woman) and the storied gods and demigods of Greek and Roman mythology. In his article "On the Shoulders of Giants," Johnson explains how his fascination with mythology contributed to the conception of Jaime Sommers:

I also read Greek and Roman mythology, so their gods and demi-gods were stuffed into my subconscious and gave me a classic foundation to build upon (without me truly realizing it). When I created *The Bionic Woman* I viewed Jaime simply as a real human being who was suddenly given powers beyond human and who struggled to deal with them. . . . It seems that Jaime had made a transformation into something larger than life on two levels: first as a compelling

character within a drama, and secondly as a suddenly-famous image. Lindsay Wagner was mobbed whenever in public because she wasn't merely Lindsay, she was Jaime. She had burst (like Athena, full-grown from the head of Zeus) into the public's collective consciousness.

Savvy audiences began taking notice of Johnson's mythological subtext in *The Bionic Woman*. For example, the head of the Psychology Department at Boston University wrote to congratulate Johnson for creating a new archetype in the form of a twentieth century demigoddess who served as a powerful role model for young women (On the Shoulders of Giants).

In the wake of Johnson's success with *The Bionic Woman*, CBS executives approached him to adapt Marvel Comics superhero The Incredible Hulk to the small screen. Initially, Johnson bristled at the opportunity because he feared he was being pigeonholed as a science fiction writer and wouldn't be taken seriously in the industry. "And further," he writes, "the comic book reality was too far from the truth of everyday reality for my taste. I just didn't relate to people who donned colorful spandex to save the world" (Truth of Science Fiction). However, as Johnson researched the Incredible Hulk universe, he uncovered thematic parallels between Hulk protagonist Bruce Banner (renamed David Banner in the series) and Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's 1862 epic novel *Les Miserables*. Both characters are fugitives harboring dark secrets who are evading relentless adversaries obsessed about capturing them. The episodic series chronicles the exploits of Dr. Banner (Bill Bixby), who, after surviving a life-changing lab accident that causes him to transform into the monstrous Hulk under times of extreme duress, travels from city to city under assumed identities as he tirelessly searches for a cure to his ailment and curse. In each episode he is pursued by an obsessed tabloid reporter named Jack McGee (Jack Colvin) who believes the Hulk is a menace to society that needs to be exposed and brought to justice.

Johnson modeled the character of McGee on Inspector Javert, Jean Valjean's longtime nemesis from Hugo's novel. Johnson also drew inspiration from the gothic work of Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson to develop the dual nature and inner demons of his protagonist. Because they both play god, David Banner and Victor Frankenstein suffer the consequences for their hubris by creating a monster that inevitably consumes them. Johnson describes his gothic novel inspirations for his interpretation of the Hulk:

The tragic Greek hero always fell victim to his own belief that he was overly wise. That belief urged him or her into committing acts which brought about tragic – and highly dramatic – results. Certain that he knew what he was doing, Dr. Jeckyl [*sic*] (and Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein) tampered with “things better left to God,” and lo, the results were frightening and horrific, leading to tragedy not only for themselves, but many innocents around him. The hubris of Dr. David Banner, his obsessive, dogged, angry determination to push his experiments beyond the realm of safety, led to a tragic and ongoing horror being visited upon him. He had damned himself like Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and had to suffer the grave and enduring consequences. Banner's physical transformation had of course been presaged by the coming of Mr. Hyde, by Bram Stoker's Dracula, and other stories which they drew from historic literature.

First I sought scientific support to bolster my effort to put as much truth as possible into the piece. I poured through biomedical research to seek some justification for the startling metamorphosis that transformed a normal man into a powerful, primitive beast. I studied cellular biology so I could inform my fiction with as much reality and logical techno-speak as possible. I suppose many

other writers of science fiction rely on true science as much as they can. (Truth of Science Fiction)

By giving David Banner the alienation of Jean Valjean, the dual nature of Dr. Jekyll, and the hubris of Victor Frankenstein, Johnson crafted a well-developed and flawed protagonist that bears the qualities of some of literature's most enduring characters. The grounded realism that the Johnson endeavored to incorporate into *The Incredible Hulk* also gave it a sense of credibility that other superhero adaptations in the 1970s (such as CBS's short-lived *The Amazing Spider-Man* series) lacked. Johnson approached *The Incredible Hulk* not as standard comic book schlock but as an "adult psychological drama that lived in the real world" (Truth of Science Fiction). *Hulk* was another ratings triumph for Johnson; the show aired for five seasons and went on to spawn three made-for-television sequels in the 1980s.

When Johnson began drafting the teleplay to what would later become *V*, he had no intention to helm yet another science fiction venture. He had originally planned to adapt Sinclair Lewis's classic political satire *It Can't Happen Here* as a made-for-television miniseries but later encountered resistance from the NBC brass due to its overtly political subject matter (Simpson). Published in October 1935, *It Can't Happen Here* depicts the rise of a fascist totalitarian regime in America. Inspired by the anxieties spawned by America's volatile political climate in the 1930s, Lewis penned a narrative that reflected the extreme demagogues from both political spectrums. As fascism tightened its iron grip on Europe and Asia in the days leading up to World War II, Americans feared the nation would follow in the goosesteps of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Lewis was attuned to this social paranoia and essentially capitalized on it by crafting a novel that played on the public's fears of being subjugated under a dictatorship. In the Introduction to the 2005 edition of *It Can't Happen Here*, Michael Meyer writes:

The novel gave shape to the free-floating anxieties that had consumed citizens for several years as the country stumbled through economic turmoil desperately seeking solutions. Lewis was intimately familiar with these concerns because Dorothy Thompson, his second wife, had interviewed Hitler as a foreign correspondent in Berlin and had written a series of articles between 1931 and 1935 warning Americans about the Nazi propaganda machine that masked the vicious persecution of Jews and growing number of concentration camps designed to annihilate them. (vi)

Fascism was becoming fashionable in Europe, as evinced by the presence of Brown Shirts in Germany, Black Shirts in Italy, and Silver Shirts in America. Media mogul William Randolph Hearst even went on record by asserting, “Whenever you hear a prominent American called a ‘Fascist,’ you can usually make up your mind that the man is simply a LOYAL CITIZEN WHO STANDS FOR AMERICANISM.” This fervent right-wing fanaticism both alarmed and inspired Lewis, who set out to paint a chilling portrait of an American totalitarian state spawned by such nationalist fervor (ix).

In the novel, Lewis’s literary equivalent to Hitler is manifested in the guise of Senator Berzelius “Buzz” Windrip, who is elected to the United States presidency in the wake of an economic collapse. On the campaign trail, the gregarious and charismatic senator from New England champions a populist platform that promises social and economic reforms along with a return to traditional values. Lewis describes the candidate Windrip as a “tireless traveler, a boisterous and humorous speaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people would like, a warm handshaker, and willing to lend money. He drank Coca-Cola with the Methodists, beer with the Lutherans, California white wine with the Jewish village merchants—

and, when they were safe from observation, white-mule corn whisky with all of them” (27).

Windrip promises the masses a redistribution of wealth that would guarantee every American an extra one thousand dollars extra per month, thus winning over the populist vote with enthusiastic aplomb. Americans of both the right and left political spectrums gradually fell under the seductive sway of Windrip’s imitable down-to-earth charm, and he was elected to the White House in a political landslide.

In the days following his inauguration, Windrip’s administration gradually morphs into a ruthless dictatorial regime that initiates an era of suppression, terror, and subjugation. Windrip’s regime rebrands itself as the American Corporate State and Patriotic Party (Corpo for short) and heralds a bloody reign of terror that includes concentration camps, summary executions without due process, suppression of the media and First Amendment, and institutionalized racism. Once he attains power, Windrip’s mask comes off, and we see the dictator for what he is. For example, Windrip channels Hitler when he summarizes his disturbing sentiments of Jews:

The real trouble with the Jews is that they are cruel. Anybody with a knowledge of history knows how they tortured poor debtors in secret catacombs, all through the Middle Ages. Whereas the Nordic is distinguished by his gentleness and his kind-heartedness to friends, children, dogs, and people of inferior races. (Lewis 186)

When the novel’s protagonist, a journalist named Doremus Jessup, dares to publish an editorial that openly condemns the Corpo state, he is instantly arrested and imprisoned for his alleged sedition. In a concentration camp, Jessup is repeatedly beaten, tortured, and interrogated, but he manages to escape and join an underground rebel movement. Meanwhile, Jessup’s own son is seduced by the Corpo lies and actively participates in public book burnings along with other

collaborators who stand to profit from Windrip's government. The Corpus seemingly end crime by arresting every suspected criminal on site without due process: "They were tried under court-martial procedure; one in ten was shot immediately, four in ten were given prison sentences, three in ten released as innocent . . ." (285).

Schools and universities are revamped to offer the same government-approved "practical and modern" curriculum, eschewing "snobbish traditions" such as Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Biblical studies, archaeology, philology, and all history before 1500 (with the exception of one course that argues the key to civilization was the Anglo-Saxon defense against barbarians). Only courses in advertising, party journalism, and business correspondence are offered, and it is forbidden to mention any authors who existed before 1800 with the exception of Milton and Shakespeare (207). The Corporate government tightens its iron grip even harder with the facilitation of the "Order of Regulation," which grants the government the power to execute or intern any person accused of undermining the state by "word or act." Because the prisons were already filled to capacity, "both for these slanderous criminals and for the persons whom the kind-hearted State had to guard by 'protective arrest,' there were immediately to be opened all over the country, concentration camps" (215).

Those who challenged or questioned the Corpus were dealt severe penalties such as the case with a band of rebellious farmers in Arkansas who find the courage to take up arms:

In Arkansas, a group of ninety-six former sharecroppers, who had always bellyached about their misfortunes yet seemed not a bit happier in well-run, hygienic labor camps with free weekly band concerts, attacked the superintendent's office at one camp and killed the superintendent and five assistants. They were rounded up by an M.M. regiment from Little Rock, stood up

in a winter-ragged cornfield, told to run, and shot in the back with machine guns as they comically staggered away. (216)

Other protestors and labor strikers suffer similar grisly fates in San Francisco, Pawtucket, and central Kansas. In New York, the Corpos embark on a preemptive strike against potential protests by immediately rounding up all suspected communists and interring them in concentration camps.

Jessup, however, isn't deterred by the Corpo thugs and doubles down his efforts to turn public opinion against Windrip by publishing an underground editorial that exposes the stomach-wrenching atrocities committed by the state's jackbooted "Minute Men" in the name of patriotism. Soon, public dissent against Windrip's barbaric regime spreads, ushering in a period of civil unrest that culminates with a political schism in Washington. Although the Corpos are still in power by the novel's end, Lewis ends his narrative on an optimistic note. Windrip himself has been overthrown by his own power-hungry associates and exiled to France, and the nation is on the brink of another civil war. Jessup, the journalist-turned-revolutionary, enlists in the New Underground movement in the Corpo-occupied territories of southern Minnesota. Jessup is last seen fleeing to a secluded cabin in the Northern Woods to evade arrest: "And still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die" (380). Although the country is still in the iron grip of a dictatorship, hope and the pursuit of liberty (as personified by Jessup) will never truly be vanquished.

According to Christopher Vials, Lewis hastily wrote *It Can't Happen Here* in two months and didn't regard the novel as his best work. Although Lewis did not particularly think much of this particular literary contribution, his readers embraced it (12).

While it did not revive his waning literary reputation, its topicality quickly placed it on the best-seller list. Most reviewers did not see it as his most well-crafted novel, but centrists, liberal, and left-wing critics alike praised its analysis of fascism and lauded its relevance to American life. (12)

Lewis's efforts to capitalize on the growing political anxieties in the 1930s paid off. *It Can't Happen Here* became a national best seller and sold more than 320,000 copies (Meyer vii).

Lizards in Jackboots

Johnson read *It Can't Happen Here* in the early 1980s and became engrossed by the novel's disturbing premise. The producer felt there was marketable potential in the story because he saw parallels between the American political climate in the 1930s and 1980s in terms of complacency and America's right-leaning political climate under Ronald Reagan (Simpson). Neither Johnson nor Lewis believed that fascism was located exclusively overseas, "nor is it something fully incompatible with American political life; rather, it is an international, cultural force also nascent within U.S. institutions, particularly in times of crisis. Its basis – xenophobia and nationalism, militarism, racism, and anti-Marxism and anti-trade unionism – reside in the fabric of America as well . . ." (Vials 13). "I was very intrigued by the notion because I felt that there was a great complacency among the American people that no real sea-change would ever take place in their life," Johnson recalled. "They'd have their small personal triumphs and tragedies, but no great societal shift in their daily life. I thought, 'Gee, suppose there were a right-wing shift in the United States, and suddenly we found ourselves living under a police state'" (Simpson).

Johnson initially penned a spec script entitled *Storm Warnings* which updated Lewis's novel in a contemporary 1980s setting. Like the novel, *Storm Warnings* depicted the rise of an extreme right-winged politician in America and the brutal systematic oppression that followed in its wake. “[*It Can't Happen Here*] concerned a fascist regime taking power in the U.S. and how people reacted to it,” Johnson explained. “I tried to find a contemporary framework in which to tell the story and *V* seemed like the perfect one. It would have been unrealistic, ironically enough, to have the invading force be an Earth-based one. The Chinese and the Soviets were obviously the first thoughts that came to mind, but I thought it would be difficult to believe that they would have the staying power or the presence to be able to commandeer the country” (Thomas).

When Johnson shopped his script around at NBC, executives were reluctant to pursue the project due to its potentially polemic content. Johnson recalls NBC's initial reaction to his teleplay in an interview with M.J. Simpson, the former editor of the British science fiction magazine *SFX*:

My friend Brandon Tartikoff at NBC read it, and was very intrigued by the notion of America living under a totalitarian regime, and a resistance force growing to fight against it. But he was concerned about the notion of fascism and suggested to me that perhaps it was a Soviet or Chinese invasion which prompted the situation. I told him I didn't believe that the Soviets or Chinese could sustain a protracted occupation of the United States, and somehow the idea came up [. . .] that perhaps it was an alien force that caused the changeover in our lives.

(Simpson)

Johnson rewrote the entire *V* miniseries in iambic pentameter and borrowed Tolstoy's methodology to introduce his massive ensemble of characters. "I never could have written *V* had I not the year before read *War and Peace*," Johnson wrote. "Yes, I know it's very big and every Russian has more nicknames than fingers, but if I had never read it I could never have created my mini-series, *V*. I was amazed by the way Tolstoy introduced so many different characters and then wove them together surprisingly into an incredibly rich tapestry. I studied how he did it." (On the Shoulders of Giants).

V begins with the sudden arrival of fifty massive flying saucers which fan out over the planet's major cities including Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Rome, Geneva, Moscow, Tokyo, and Buenos Aires. We are introduced to the miniseries's various human characters as they react to the frenetic media coverage of the alien invasion as it unfolds. When the Visitors make contact with their human hosts on the roof of the United Nations building in New York, they appear like average human beings adorned in red militaristic uniforms. The Visitor admiral, who identifies himself as John (Richard Herd), assuages the public's fear by assuring the news media that he and his people are essentially astronauts who have come to Earth in search of a chemical to save their dying planet near the star Sirius. In exchange for humanity's assistance, John promises to share the fruits of their medical knowledge and radically advanced technology with Earth and depart as they had arrived—"in peace."

Within days of their arrival, the Visitors begin allying themselves with the world's most elite citizens, including politicians, the rich and affluent, and high-profile media personalities. Much of the populace succumbs to the Visitors' seductions, but there are pockets of scientists including biology student Juliet Parrish (Faye Grant) who grow skeptical of the aliens' seemingly benevolent overtures. The Visitors' insistence that only media personnel be allowed

onboard their gigantic motherships only fuels the scientific community's suspicions, and several investigations are launched to uncover the Visitors' true intentions. Echoing Buzz Windrip's relentless war against the journalists who publically criticized him, the Visitors use their newly formed media connections to discredit and disparage the world's scientific community by framing them for a terrorist conspiracy. As a result, harsh laws are quickly passed that restrict scientist activities and monitor their everyday movements, and the public opinion turns sharply against biologists, chemists, anthropologists, or anyone with a scientific pedigree. Scientists who still have the audacity to openly criticize the Visitors are summarily arrested and transported to alien motherships to be "reeducated." As more and more of her peers are treated like second-class citizens and vanish without a trace, Juliet is forced to abandon her passion as a biologist, a life dedicated to saving other lives, to form an underground resistance movement to counter the burgeoning Visitor oppression. Meanwhile, photo journalist Michael Donovan (Mark Singer) stows away on a Visitor shuttle and sneaks aboard a mothership to discover that the aliens are much more alien than they lead the public to believe; beneath their human masks, the Visitors are revealed to be carnivorous bipedal reptilians that ingest hamsters, rodents, and birds like potato chips. When the Visitors learn that Donovan could expose their true natures, they use their technology to wrest total control of every channel on television and appoint human journalist Kristine Walsh (Jenny Sullivan) as their "official" spokesman. Walsh, who sold out her journalistic integrity in exchange for serving as the Visitor equivalent of Joseph Goebbels, publically denounces Donovan (her former colleague) as a terrorist, forcing the cameraman to join the human resistance in a desperate effort to clear his name and expose the Visitors.

Like the superficial skins that mask the Visitors, Johnson's miniseries is deceiving on the surface because it only *appears* like traditional science fiction fare but is in fact a socio-political

allegory in disguise. “When you're writing in an allegorical genre, such as we are, it offers us a wonderful opportunity to make comments and allows us to see the human world through the lens, if you will, of the alien consciousness,” the showrunner told Michael Schneider in 2009. “So it was always a lot of fun to do.” Johnson incorporates clichéd science fiction conventions such as flying saucers, reptilian aliens, laser guns, and spaceship battles into his teleplay, but these elements never undermine or diminish the themes that had been inspired by Sinclair Lewis’s novel. For example, the aliens’ futuristic weaponry, as previously noted, was actually modeled after German Luger pistols, their uniforms were designed to channel those worn by the German *Wehrmacht* in the 1940s, and their flag is a variation of the Nazi swastika. The evil Visitor second-in-command, Diana (Jane Badler), like the notorious Nazi surgeon Josef Mengele, conducts sadistic medical experiments on human captives (Simpson). “The Nazis showed us one face for a while and then they took it off and showed us their real faces— metaphorically speaking,” Johnson remarked (Baldwin). According to his DVD commentary, Johnson also based human resistance leader Juliet Parrish on the real-life French resistance fighter Andrea Dijon to give his secondary protagonist a sense of realism.

One of the more memorable characters in the original *V* is a Holocaust survivor named Abraham Bernstein (Leonardo Cimino), who makes several references to the atrocities he witnessed during the Second World War and to the parallels between the Visitors and Nazi Germany. When the Visitors first arrive, he expresses concern about the influence they begin to wield over the gullible American populace through their manipulation of the media through television. In awe of their technological prowess, thousands of humans flock to the Visitor ranks including Abraham’s own grandson, who becomes duped by the barrage of pro-Visitor propaganda and begins to don a uniform reminiscent of Hitler’s Brown Coats. “Don’t worry

Abraham,” his friend Ruby (Camila Ashland) assures him. “It’s not like your family are scientists. You’re not involved. And this will all blow over soon,” she continues. Abraham isn’t so easily convinced. “That’s what I thought in 1938,” he retorts. Ruby counters by pointing out that 1938 was a totally different scenario. Abraham glances at his teenaged grandson proudly adorned in Visitor regalia like a member of the Hitler Youth. “Is it?” he asks portentously (Original Miniseries).

In one particularly poignant scene near the end of the first half of the miniseries, the Holocaust survivor admonishes his son Stanley (George Morfogen) for his apathy during the Visitor occupation. Abraham wishes to convert his home into an underground railroad of sorts in an effort to provide refuge to scientists or resistance leaders under persecution by the Visitors, but Stanley is less than enthused about the idea. The trenchant and sage Abraham then reminds his obstinate son about his late mother, whom he was led to believe had died from a heart attack during the Second World War. The scene unfolds in Johnson’s screenplay:

STANLEY

I know the story!

ABRAHAM

No, you don’t! You don’t. Your mother, *b’shalom*. . .Your mother didn't have a heart attack in the boxcar. She made it with me, to the camp. I can still see her, standing naked in the freezing cold. Her beautiful black hair was gone. They'd shaved her head. I can still see her waving to me as they marched her off with the others to the showers – the showers with no water. Perhaps, if somebody had given us a place to hide . . . don't you see, Stanley? They have to stay. Or else, we haven't learned a thing. (Johnson screenplay)

A contrite and tearful Stanley finally relents and allows the displaced resistance members to remain in their home despite the severe consequences that potentially await them if they are found out.

Despite the presence of aliens and spaceships, Sinclair Lewis's literary influences are still prevalent throughout the miniseries. For example, as the human resistance gains momentum, the Visitors introduce helmeted shock troopers to enforce security and curfews on the streets much like Buzz Windrip's jackbooted Minute Man *phalanxes*. Instead of journalists like Doremus Jessup being persecuted and ostracized by propaganda in *It Can't Happen Here*, it is the scientific community in *V* that poses the most significant danger to the totalitarian regime and is therefore repudiated and denounced by the Visitor-controlled media. Echoing the ill-fated farmers who revolted against Minute Man claxons in Lewis's novel, ranch hands fed up with Visitor-imposed curfews, tariffs, and price increases attempt a similar insurrection in the second part of *V* but suffer a severe consequence for their insolence as one young eye witness recalls:

“Lots of people were getting tired of what the Visitors were doing. So Sunday a bunch of ranch hands in the area—you know the kind of guys—they drove into town and threw a homemade bomb right underneath a squad vehicle. Blew it up. The local supervisor guy was inside. They blew it up and killed him. Then a lot of folks started shouting, stuff about this was America, and we weren't gonna put up with these goddamn Visitors anymore. [. . .] Then everyone was clapping and cheering. Suddenly the lights went out. All at once. Then everyone got scared, and ran. [. . .] There were lights in the sky, so bright you couldn't see where you were going. Roaring toward you. They were troop transports, I recognized 'em when they landed. People screamed and ran.” (Johnson and Crispin)

Visitor shock troopers don't distinguish dissident from non-dissident and summarily arrest the entire neighborhood's inhabitants for sedition including Mike Donovan's ex-wife and eleven-year-old son, Shawn, the latter of whom serves as a primary motivation for the camera man-turned-insurgent to overthrow their Visitors.

Racing against the clock to free his son from the clutches of the aliens, Donavon stows away once again in the Los Angeles-based mothership and encounters a mysterious Visitor named Martin (Frank Ashmore) who is a member of a clandestine alien fifth column that opposes the Visitors' insidious plan. Martin delivers several lines of exposition detailing the hierarchy of the Visitor government and its ultimate objective: stealing the Earth's water supply and harvesting human beings for food. Martin also provides chilling details about the Visitor dictator's rise to power on his home planet, which echoes Adolf Hitler's own tyrannical ascent through the governmental ranks in 1933 Germany. "How did somebody like that get into power anyway?" Donovan asks. "Charisma," Martin answers solemnly. "Circumstances. Promises. Financial backing. A doctrine that appealed to the unthinking—assurances that he, as their leader, would bring them to greatness. Not enough of us spoke out to question him—or even took him seriously—until it was too late. It's happened here on your planet, hasn't it?" (Johnson and Crispin 230). Martin's revelations about his Leader also channel Buzz Windrip's ascension to the presidency in *It Can't Happen Here*. Like the Visitor leader, Windrip skillfully paints himself as a charismatic orator, populist, patriot, and down-home man of the people whom no one takes seriously until it is too late.

What makes the Visitor plan so unnerving and terrifying is its plausibility and realism. The most dangerous weapon the Visitors wield isn't a death ray cannon or a colossal city-smashing mecha robot—it's seduction. Unlike the alien "pod people" in *Invasion of the Body*

Snatchers (1956) or the parasitic beings in Robert A. Heinlen's 1951 novel *The Puppet Masters*, the extraterrestrials in *V* don't possess human bodies or make carbon copies to do their bidding. Nor do they use their motherships to topple national landmarks or decimate cities like the invaders in *War of the Worlds* (1953) or *Independence Day* (1996). The Visitors instead exploit humanity's own proclivity for prejudice, greed, avarice, and ambition and use it against us so that civilization essentially turns on itself. History has demonstrated countless times when society creates its own totalitarian dictatorships and pays the ultimate price for it such as Nazi Germany, the Khmers Rouge in Cambodia, the gruesome genocide in Rwanda, and Chile under the tyrannical grip of Pinochet. When the Visitors offer certain hand-picked individuals the opportunity for social ascension in exchange for their loyalty, these collaborators jump on the chance without hesitation at the expense of their fellow man. Humans ironically aid their own enslavers in their insidious conquest of Earth and expedite their own destruction. Neighbor turns against neighbor, friend turns against friend, and coworker turns against coworker. As Johnson reflected:

The heart of the show is the human element. What *V* is really about is how people change—the relationships of people and how they react. How would you react to an occupying army? It's about a family whose son becomes a member of the youth organization because of his friends—sounds like the Hitler youth, doesn't it? As time goes by, parents have to be careful about what they say in their own house because he's there and involved with them. Other people might say, "How can I get something out of this?" Some of us become opportunists and collaborators, like the Vichy French. Others of us say, "It will pass. This doesn't happen in America, it can't happen here. I don't have anything to worry about. I'm

not Jewish.” Then there is the group of people that say, “No. This is wrong. We’re going to fight it!” And they become the resistance. (Thomas)

Power lies at the heart of the diegesis, and it is the most compelling theme of the *V* saga because it explores the story’s human characters rather than rely on special effects, action, or aliens.

Johnson wasn’t the first filmmaker to use science fiction conventions in this way. In Rod Serling’s stirring 1960 *Twilight Zone* episode “The Monsters are Due on Maple Street,” a technologically advanced race of humanoid extraterrestrials exploit humanity’s innate prejudices and propensity for violence in order to take over the planet. In the beginning of the 1960 episode, Maple Street is presented as a tranquil American suburb complete with laughing children frolicking in their yards, adults mowing their lawns, and patrons lining up for the ice cream truck. But all is not well with this seemingly harmonious all-American setting. Shortly after an unidentified flying object hurtles across the night sky, all the electricity on Maple Street inexplicably goes out, stoking a mass panic. Lawnmowers, telephones, and vehicles also cease to function, and the once peaceful neighborhood descends into chaos as neighbors begin pointing fingers at one another for causing the power outage. As the panic escalates, an innocent bystander is shot to death by an enraged homeowner, triggering all-out carnage. It is revealed that the mysterious object that had hovered over Maple Street is indeed a flying saucer and that its interstellar inhabitants masterminded the power outages to foment human conflict. Two alien observers remark on how easy it was to manipulate human prejudice and paranoia. They conclude the most efficient way to conquer Earth is to turn humanity against itself. Serling’s closing narration sums up the theme concisely:

The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices—to be

found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill—and suspicion can destroy—and a thoughtless frightened search for a scapegoat has a fallout all of its own—for the children—and the children yet unborn. And the pity of it is—that these things cannot be confined—to the Twilight Zone. (“The Monsters are Due on Maple Street”)

Johnson implemented a similar approach with the original *V*. His chief antagonists use the media as a tool to seduce, influence, and corrupt humans by singling out a minority of the populace (the scientists) and accusing them of sedition and terrorism much like Joe McCarthy’s notorious political witch hunts to root out American communist sympathizers in the 1950s. Humans are offered monetary rewards, high ranks within the Visitor ranks, and societal privileges in exchange for their loyalty, causing humans to turn on one another in order to gain an advantage. For example, the greedy and opportunistic Eleanor Dupres (Neva Patterson) spots a fugitive scientist and his family being smuggled out of the city in the bed of a pickup truck and reports her findings to a nearby Visitor patrol in exchange for monetary compensation.

The seduction of power spawns two opposing forces in *V*: the corrupt and the heroic. In a 2008 interview with *Hero Complex*, Johnson expounded on why power is a paramount theme in *V*:

V is a timeless story of resistance against tyrannical oppression. It was never about big spaceships and aliens. *V* was about power: ruthless people who possessed power, those who sucked up to it, and those everyday people who risked their lives to fight against the abuse of power. Though I based much of it on happenings in World War II, *V* also has resonance of Apartheid, the American Revolution and Spartacus’ revolt of the slaves. That historical underpinning gives

V a depth and substance that helped to make it, as some reviewers noted, an instant classic. (Margulies)

The “depth and substance” that Johnson incorporated into *V* are universal themes that have allowed the miniseries to resonate three decades after it premiered. When the miniseries was released to DVD in 2001, Warner Home Video executives thought the disc would sell as a cult item, but the studio ended up selling 2.5 million copies for a revenue of fifty million dollars (Margulies). *V*'s theme of systematic oppression struck a poignant chord with audiences from multiple generations, ethnicities, and cultures. From African Americans, who endured racial segregation in the South, to gays and lesbians being ostracized by society to children or teenagers who suffered bullying in school, virtually everyone has experienced some form of intolerance in his or her lifetime, and the plight of the resistance in *V* is something to which many viewers could relate. As Sarah McCoy writes:

Twenty-seven years later, the story is as fresh as it was in 1983. As fresh as it was in 1935. Let's face it—fascism still scares the hell out of us. The idea of social interventionism to promote the state's interests is terrifying. Social indoctrination by way of state-regulated education and media propaganda makes our skin crawl. Eugenics for the purpose of social hygiene is monstrous. Discrimination based on culture, gender and sexuality is a nasty battle we fight daily. A hunger for expansionist imperialism, ideologically and physically, lingers on. Turn on the nightly news, tune into reality, and notes of Lewis's novel and Johnson's script continue to echo. This may be exactly why *V* has seen such popularity with the 2010 audience. We live in a world where history repeats itself; where old ideas cloak themselves in various contemporary skins and pretty packages for each

budding generation. The series continues to strike a chord because in a non-didactic way, it reminds us that the catastrophes of our past are but a handful of forgetful seasons away. (McCoy)

The universal themes of intolerance, occupation, and resistance that Johnson incorporated into *V* instilled his ambitious miniseries with a timeless quality that continues to resonate today in the face of the Islamic State in Iraq and Bashar al-Assad's despotic regime in Syria.

The somber socio-political content of *V* was a fairly heavy affair for early 1980s network television considering it aired during the same year as *Gimme a Break!* (NBC, 1981-1987), *Dukes of Hazzard* (CBS, 1979-1985), and *The Facts of Life* (NBC, 1979-1988), but audiences overwhelmingly embraced it. The thirteen million dollar miniseries drew more than eighty million viewers and spawned a three-part sequel miniseries and a weekly television series (Bedell). The sci-fi miniseries also garnered acclaim overseas, particularly in South Africa, where the beleaguered population was struggling under the oppression of Apartheid. "I think one of the most rewarding things I heard about *V* was after the government of South Africa had put it on the state-operated television as 'an example of black people and white people working together happily,'" Johnson recalled. "This was back in the days of apartheid, remember. But the day after it aired, there were big red 'V's spray-painted all over the walls in Soweto and Johannesburg. It was very interesting," he continued (Simpson). By revising his dystopian political film into an alien invasion epic, Johnson was able to reach a broader audience and still get his message across. Johnson used his knack for solid storytelling to create well-rounded characters that average viewers could relate to, and seeing their favorite characters languishing in the tyrannical grip of the Visitors gave audiences a sobering lesson about the consequences of political extremism.

In his book *Television Entertainment*, Jonathan Gray examines the benefits of conventional TV as an affective learning tool. Because of its dry, impersonal nature, political news can be off-putting for certain demographics, but when political themes are presented in a more personal milieu they become more relevant and accessible for some viewers (142). He argues that “television entertainment’s ability to make us care, its narrative capacities to hook us in, and its characters that occasionally become as friends to us may prove precisely the connection required to make an otherwise seemingly distant political issue become one that matters to us” (143). In lieu of watching detached newsreels depicting the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan or the exploits of the totalitarian regimes of Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania, American audiences in the early 1980s learned about the horrors of autocratic dictatorships through *V* by watching living, breathing characters whom they cared about struggle against the icy Visitors. Water cooler discussions that were typically reserved for the latest episodes of *Family Ties* or *Cheers* became political discourses about the vagaries of governmental rule. *V* provided an accessible political science resource for those individuals who didn’t necessarily keep up with the nightly news headlines or had limited knowledge of world history.

The ending of *V* mirrors the concluding chapters of *It Can’t Happen Here* in that it ends on a message of hope for a better day, even though that better day may never come. Despite the betrayal from one of its own, the resistance successfully fends off a Visitor aerial attack on its mountain camp and saves its cache of pilfered weapons and equipment. However, the rebel victory doesn’t come without a costly price; several members of the resistance are felled in combat, and the Visitors are still very much in power by the film’s end. A human teenager named Robin Maxwell (Blair Tefkin), who was seduced by a Visitor at the behest of Diana,

suspects she may be pregnant with a hybrid child. Donovan is last seen fleeing from a Visitor night patrol squad after pleading with his opportunist mother to see through the Visitor deceptions, much like Jessup skipping town to evade the pursuing Minute Men squadron in the closing narration of Lewis's novel. Meanwhile, Juliet Parrish is last seen assisting burglar-turned-resistance fighter Alias Taylor (Michael Wright) dispatch an interstellar message from the National Radio Astronomy Observatory west of Socorro, New Mexico. The space-bound message is encrypted mathematically and is essentially a call for help to any would-be enemies of the Visitors. Alias spray paints a red "V" on the observatory's exterior (symbolizing the word *victory*), which was an act popularized by the Allied Powers in World War II (MacDonald). Although Johnson offers no quick-fix solutions or remedies against fascism, prejudice, or systematic oppression, his unresolved ending does provide a semblance of hope that humanity would somehow endure and persevere. It is the same modicum of hope that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. imparted in his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech and that Mahatma Gandhi bestowed upon the masses with his calls for non-violent resistance. Hope may not be a panacea against violence or hate, but in desperate times it suffices.

CHAPTER TWO:

V GOES PRIMETIME (1984-1985)

NBC's thirteen million dollar gamble on Kenneth Johnson's compelling "Nazis from space" allegory paid off tenfold. The 1983 alien invasion miniseries drew more than eighty million viewers and a forty share, giving the then-struggling Peacock a much-needed primetime ratings boost (Bedell). It didn't take long for NBC executives to demand the inevitable sequel. In the wake of *V*'s success, Johnson commenced writing what would later become *V: The Final Battle*. He originally envisioned that his science fiction epic would thrive as a series of ongoing made-for-television movies over the course of several years. Much to Johnson's chagrin and dismay, however, NBC and Warner Brothers balked at the idea (and the exorbitant cost) and instead ordered a six-hour sequel to conclude the saga. Not only did the network reject Johnson's proposal to turn *V* into a series of television movies, the studio also demanded that five million dollars be slashed from its initial budget (Garmon). Further compounding the issue, the network also scheduled the *V* sequel to air during the May 1984 sweeps period, giving Johnson less than a year to complete the new miniseries from scratch. Johnson left the project in frustration, and a new creative team was appointed to helm the ambitious miniseries, which aired from May 6 to May 8, 1984. Although the sequel was another ratings triumph for NBC, the second miniseries lacks the panache, literary depth, and sociopolitical motifs of its acclaimed predecessor. Emboldened by *The Final Battle*'s exemplary ratings, NBC and Warner Brothers decided to turn *V* into a primetime weekly series in 1985. With Johnson's absence, however, the *V* franchise rapidly deteriorated into a more formulaic soap operatic affair. The weekly series eschewed Johnson's original political subtext and social themes to resort to redundant melodrama and

hammy sci-fi clichés, and disenfranchised viewers began a mass exodus that culminated with *V*'s cancellation in 1985.

The Not-So Final Battle

The original *V* miniseries was a ratings boon for NBC, and production on a sequel hastily commenced in the wake of its success. However, the project was riddled with controversy and setbacks from the start. Three months after *V* premiered, Johnson collaborated with Craig Buck, Peggy Goldman and Diane Frolov to draft the storyline for a second miniseries by implementing an intricate system of index cards to track continuity and character arcs. “Basically the four of us sat in a room and took the characters that Kenny had created in the original four hours and tried to take them into what I thought was going to be six pretty amazing hours of television,” recalled Buck (Thomas). However, a confluence of two inexorable forces threatened to derail the project’s development: time and money. The network demanded that the *V* sequel air during its May 1984 sweeps week, and Warner Brothers requested that five million dollars be pared from the budget. The studio’s requests were an insult for Johnson, and he abandoned the project in the early development stages. “My feeling was that Warner Brothers was worried I wouldn't do *V* as quick, cheap and dirty as they wanted it done, and they were right, so I left,” Johnson recalled in a 1996 interview. He continued, “They were astonished because I also had, at the time, a 12-hour blind series commitment with NBC through Warner Bros., which was going to bite the dust if I left. That’s about a half-million and they said nobody walks away from that. My response was, ‘Oh yeah? Read my lips, guys’” (Thomas). Following Johnson’s unceremonious departure, NBC contracted a new creative team to helm the embattled project including *Futureworld*

director Richard T. Heffron, who wanted to make the *V* sequel more “viewer-friendly” by omitting Johnson’s sociopolitical subtext.

Set four months after the events of the original, *V: The Final Battle* continues the struggles of the human resistance to overcome Visitor tyranny. Michael Donovan (Mark Singer) and Juliet Parrish (Faye Grant) are forced to enlist the services of seedy mercenary Ham Tyler (Michael Ironside) to make a desperate final push to liberate the planet. There are numerous on-screen gun battles and car chases between human and alien including a violent firefight at a reservoir that leaves several resistance members dead. After exposing Visitor commander John’s (Richard Herd) true reptilian face in all its grotesque glory on national television fails to turn the tide of the war to their favor, the resistance has a breakthrough when Robin Maxwell (Blair Tefkin) gives birth to human-Visitor hybrid twins. One of the infants is a humanoid “Star Child” (whom Robin affectionately names Elizabeth) who is endowed with mystical powers and ages at an accelerated rate. Elizabeth’s far less-attractive twin brother, however, inherits more of their Visitor father’s physical traits. The unnamed infant is scaly and reptilian in nature and ultimately succumbs to terrestrial germs shortly after birth. Resistance scientists use the dead infant’s blood to synthesize a biological agent codenamed “red dust” that could potentially change the course of the war. The dispersing of the red dust would effectively create a virulent strain of bacteria that would eradicate the Visitors but would be benign for humans. Although the hawkish Tyler advocates that the weapon be deployed immediately, Donovan argues that not all Visitors deserve to die such as his friend and rescuer Martin (Frank Ashmore) and other benevolent members of the Visitor fifth column like Willi (portrayed by a pre-*Nightmare on Elm Street* Robert Englund). Juliet expresses anxieties that the dispersion of the red dust could force the

Visitors to activate their “ultimate weapon,” an explosive so powerful that it could eradicate the entire planet.

After coming to a reluctant compromise, the resistance inoculates select members of the Visitor fifth column from the deadly toxin and begins dispersing the red dust spores across the planet using hot air balloons. The result is as devastating for the Visitors as the resistance had hoped. Within hours, all of the water, air, and food resources on Earth become contaminated by the red dust’s toxic effects, and the Visitors are forced to abandon their plan of conquest and abscond from the planet *en masse*. However, the vindictive Diana refuses to go down without a fight and activates the Los Angeles mothership’s self-destructive doomsday device before escaping in an adjacent shuttle. With Earth’s destruction hopelessly imminent, the Star Child Elizabeth (Jenny Beck) just happens to be on the scene and, in *deus ex machina* fashion, halts the self-destruct sequence with her telekinetic abilities to save the planet from certain doom.

Although the *V* sequel was another ratings juggernaut for NBC, Johnson was not celebrating. In an email interview, Johnson informed me that he was less than enthusiastic over what became of his self-described masterwork:

Though I supervised the writing of the six-hour 1984 sequel, I left Warners over creative differences before it was produced. My friends who were involved with it warned me never to see how those who took over had destroyed our screenplay. To this day I have never seen it, except for one minute by accident—in which I saw them make every wrong choice possible, so I knew I’d never survive watching the entire thing. I never saw any of the 1985 series at all, but my friends who were in it said it was pretty awful and certainly missed the essence of what I had been attempting to create. (Johnson interview)

The Final Battle is essentially a palimpsest of Johnson's work because many of his original ideas survived the numerous script rewrites and revisions, but he refused to have his name attached to the project. Instead, Johnson's contributions to the *V* sequel are credited under the pseudonym "Lillian Weezer."

The Final Battle's frugal budget hindered many of the film's special effects shots, which are composed of recycled images and stock footage mined from the original miniseries including various shots of Visitor shuttles and motherships that were overlaid onto new backgrounds. The writers and producers found creative ways in which to circumnavigate the production in order to avoid budget pitfalls. For example, in one of *The Final Battle*'s many action sequences, Donovan was originally chased by a Visitor shuttle through a cemetery. However, since the scene as it was originally conceived in the script was too expensive to shoot, the studio came up with an alternative cost-cutting solution. *Final Battle* scribe Brian Taggert recalled:

It was a scene that we just couldn't afford. We already had the shots of the spaceship, so I came up with the idea of giving the audience a future and a past in opposition. I had Donovan on horseback with the spaceships following him. Subliminally it would have an impact on the audience, and we already had the shot. All we had to do was re-matte it and it saved a lot of money. It's actually great fun to have a handicap and find that you can't just open the coffers and pour money at a problem. You have to look at it and see how you can deliver the product while not throwing the network into bankruptcy. (Thomas).

This cost-saving practice of cutting and pasting would continue throughout the production of the weekly series that followed *The Final Battle* in 1985.

The Final Battle's most egregious offense for some diehard *V* fans, however, was its blatant omission of Johnson's sociopolitical themes and literary influences. The sequel instead emphasizes action sequences, stock characters, and science fiction clichés to drive its narrative, which is a pitfall that Johnson endeavored carefully to avoid in his original. Whereas *War and Peace* and *It Can't Happen Here* served as inspirations for the original, *The Final Battle* was inspired by the popular primetime soap operas that dominated the airwaves during the 1980s such as *Dallas* (1978-91), *Dynasty* (1981-89), and *Falcon Crest* (1981-90). The Visitor hierarchy is portrayed like the Ewing family in terms of scandalous politics, internal power struggles, skullduggery, betrayal, and backstabbing. Meanwhile, the human resistance is no longer composed of scientists who have been systematically ostracized and blacklisted; the rebels are now machine gun-toting television action heroes reminiscent of the A-Team or Magnum, P.I. The decision to forego Johnson's themes for a more conventional approach was no accident, according to *Final Battle* executive producer Daniel Blatt:

The Nazi allegory was Ken Johnson's take on the material. [. . .] My parents were Holocaust survivors, so God knows I come from that background. But I never really saw *V* that way. I really approached it in two ways. First, we had to have fun with the villains because they were bigger than life and Jane Badler was just wonderful. I also chose to focus on the heroism of people who believe in something and will do what is necessary and make whatever sacrifice they have to. Rather than looking at it from the negative, I was trying to be positive. Marc Singer, Faye Grant, Michael Ironside—those were heroes, but each hero was also not a perfect person. They all had their own foibles and faults, but their overall

goal was to work together to end the threat. That's what I chose to focus on.

(Thomas)

The Final Battle producers deliberately camped up the material in hopes to attract the viewership of the aforementioned primetime soap operas for the least amount of money and capitalize from the science fiction boom in the wake of *Return of the Jedi's* success in 1983. As Buck frustratingly remarked in 1996:

I don't think those people really understood what *V* was about. My feeling was that they tried to do six hours of television that could have as much action and special effects that they could cram in within their budget. That really meant designing a story around action sequences rather than designing action sequences around a story. I can't speak too authoritatively about what they did because I didn't see the whole thing, but the changes I am aware of I'm amazed at. What made the original miniseries work was the World War II analogy. That's what makes *Star Trek* and any great science fiction work: people are able to identify with the characters, see themselves in their place and, in turn, understand themselves. Taking it a step further in the case of *V*, you're not only seeing yourself in that situation, you're seeing society in it as well. The concept of someone coming in and making promises to people who are hungry to hear those promises, and then for those people to turn out to have a dark underbelly that only some people can see, is powerful stuff. That all got lost. They really went for the effects rather than story or character. (Thomas)

With *The Final Battle*, NBC essentially revamped *V* into just another of the many *Star Wars* clones that proliferated in the early 1980s: a fast-paced space opera action romp with little to no

depth, originality, or character development. Instead of using clandestine and Machiavellian tactics to turn humans against one another by exploiting their prejudices, the Visitors in *The Final Battle* borrow from George Lucas's evil Darth Vader or campy *Flash Gordon* antagonist Ming the Merciless in that they focus their efforts on destroying the planet with a clichéd doomsday device onboard their mothership. The resistance fighters, meanwhile, become one-dimensional swashbuckling action hero stock characters who swoop in to thwart the aliens with machine guns and hand grenades. Although the original miniseries sports its own fair share of science fiction tropes, Johnson used those conventions as tools to convey a deeper message about human nature.

One of the more complex characters from the original miniseries is “brownshirt” collaborator Daniel Bernstein (David Packer). Johnson portrays Daniel as an alienated teenager who struggles at school and has very few friends. When the Visitors offer him a position within their “Visitor Youth” organization, Daniel finally feels a sense of belonging and joins the Visitor ranks without hesitation. Daniel proudly dons the Visitor uniform and is even issued a laser sidearm. As he rises through the ranks, Daniel is showered with lavish gifts such as diamonds and vintage champagne purloined from families in captivity. In exchange for the gifts, Daniel's commander demands his total loyalty, even when it comes to his own family. When Daniel informs on his father for secretly housing fugitives in their backyard pool house, his parents are taken captive and tortured aboard the mothership. When we last see Daniel in the original miniseries, he is soul searching and alone. Burdened with guilt, the forlorn teenager sits at the vacant dining room table and stares longingly at the empty chairs that once accommodated his mother and father. However, Daniel's character development is abandoned in the sequel as he becomes just another Republic serial-styled villain who exhibits no remorse for his previous

transgressions and relishes in his power as a Visitor youth commander. In an early scene in *The Final Battle*, Daniel coerces a human prisoner at gunpoint to lie prostrate on the ground and lick his jackboots. Daniel becomes a mere caricature of himself and eschews the inner turmoil and moral struggle that made his arc so compelling in the original miniseries.

To this day, Johnson claims he has never watched *V: The Final Battle* in its entirety. When asked about how his version of script differed from the finished product, Johnson told me via email that his version was a darker, grittier affair that would have continued to espouse the sociopolitical themes first visited in the original miniseries. “Our original screenplay for the six-hour sequel resides in my files, but I can’t release or publish it because it’s really Warner Bros property,” he wrote. “Suffice it to say, there was no ridiculous ‘Star Child’ such as I’ve heard about—and Ham Tyler’s entire character was built upon the fact that he was permanently confined to a wheelchair” (Johnson interview). Had the network not interfered, the original draft of *The Final Battle* would have climaxed with the impending self-destruction of the Visitor mothership. The Visitor fifth column leader, Martin, courageously pilots the doomed vessel into the far reaches of space seconds before it explodes, saving the human race in a dramatic act of self-sacrifice. Johnson’s intended sequel ends on another cliffhanger with Donovan and Julie using a stolen Visitor shuttle to pursue the remaining motherships filled with human cargo and pillaged water as the defeated Visitors retreat back to their home world. “They realize that they’ve been successful in forcing the Visitors off the planet, but that they’re taking many Earth people with them,” Johnson recalled. “Donovan and Julie look at each other and silently decide to go after them. Donovan kicks the ship in gear and they go flying up after the second mothership. The sequel’s last scene is they’re heading for this mothership and its doors are closing. They just make it as the doors close and the camera pans up the craft’s side and locks on

a window” (Thomas). Contrary to popular belief, there is a Visitor-human hybrid named Elizabeth that features in Johnson’s original draft, but the character is merely a biracial child who does not wield any supernatural powers. Elizabeth was originally created to serve as a symbol of hope in that both Visitors and humans could one day peacefully co-exist. The character would have featured prominently in future sequels, which Johnson planned to release every spring for the next five years (Thomas).

Some cast members also felt the sequel was not a worthy follow-up to Johnson’s story. Marc Singer, who portrayed cameraman-turned-rebel Michael Donovan, said the cliché-ridden *Final Battle* eschewed much of the verisimilitude that kept the original so compelling. “There’s no question,” he said in 1996, “that when the originator is no longer with the project, the project is going to have a different focus and philosophy guiding it. Personally, I prefer the original concept, the concept that shed light on how society can be subverted and how people are cast into turmoil by political events. *V* in its ultimate form, *The Final Battle*, was more of an adventure series and I feel that we did not focus as strongly as we had on the same intellectual underpinnings that we did originally” (Thomas). Actor David Packer detested the latter miniseries. “Any of us who were in the first miniseries, who were in it for more than the money, felt that the second miniseries went in the wrong direction,” he said. According to Packer, the second film was purely motivated by greed: “It was like working at Burger King or something,” he quipped. “In the first one, Kenny’s idea was to take the story of the Nazis and make it contemporary and see if it could drum up the same kind of human issues. The second one was more like, ‘Let’s see how long people will wait to see what the baby looks like.’ The second one was bullshit. The other thing is that the first one had like five years of stuff happening while the next six hours maybe two weeks’ worth of stuff. It’s like putting a lot of cream cheese on the

first group of bagels, but when you get to the last ones, you have to spread it on thinly” (Thomas). The ebbing quality Packer lamented in *The Final Battle* would continue to plague the *V* franchise in future installments.

Despite the steep decline in standards, the *V* sequel was another ratings bonanza for NBC, with more than fifty million viewers and a 31 share (Priol). Emboldened by *The Final Battle*’s success, NBC decided to take the fledgling *V* franchise to the next level: a weekly primetime television series. When NBC approached Johnson to helm the proposed weekly series, he scoffed at the very notion. “There was too much water under that bridge,” he remarked (Thomas). Therefore, the network was forced to look elsewhere for its creative team. The end result amounted to one of the costliest television flops in history.

***V*’s Short-Lived Dynasty**

Had Johnson’s original vision come to fruition, *V* would have continued as a series of two-hour made-for-television films. The sequels would have continued to espouse the themes of prejudice, power, and systematic oppression that defined the original miniseries. The human resistance would have eventually overthrown their Visitor overlords, and collaborators would have been indicted in a dramatic trial reminiscent of Nuremberg. The surviving Visitors would have been made vulnerable after having been stripped of their technology and forced to integrate into human society. The only employment the Visitor refugees would have been able to obtain were menial jobs like janitorial work, and they would have been compensated far less than their human counterparts. It is here that Johnson would have “turned the Holocaust metaphor on its ear,” portraying the deposed Visitors as the saga’s underclass. The aliens would have essentially become second-class citizens much like African Americans living in the South under Jim Crow.

Not only would the Visitors have confronted human prejudice and racism but also humans bent on revenge. Former resistance members Donovan and Julie were to refocus their crusade on saving their former enemies by fighting for their rights against bigoted segregationist laws. However, Johnson's vision never saw the light of day. NBC executives balked at the exorbitant cost to produce such a series of sequels, and Johnson left the project due to creative differences and incorporated his ideas for the *V* sequel in the television adaptation of the 1988 science fiction film *Alien Nation*, which premiered on Fox in 1989 (Green). Following the ratings success of *The Final Battle*, NBC decided to turn *V* into a weekly television series instead.

Helmed by Daniel Blatt and Robert Singer, *V: The Series* aired on NBC from October 26, 1984 to March 22, 1985. The short-lived episodic production was troubled from the start. At a whopping one million dollars per episode, it was the most expensive television series produced at the time (Terrace 432). As a result, episodes of the series would routinely recycle clips and stock footage from the original miniseries as well as other science fiction films. Although they began as Machiavellian puppet masters in the original miniseries, the Visitors in the weekly series were rebranded as an interstellar Ewing family that engages in inter-rivalries, backstabbing, and even catfights inspired by the hair-pulling bouts between Joan Collins and Linda Evans in *Dynasty*. British actress June Chadwick (*This is Spinal Tap*) was brought in to play a rival Visitor commander named Lydia to counter Diana's authoritarian power and foment onscreen tension. The two ambitious Visitor women frequently plot against each other and take turns in usurping their respective plans in soap operatic fashion. Diana's attire was altered in the weekly series as well. In lieu of *Wehrmacht*-styled coveralls and jackboots, Diana appears in several episodes (such as the infamous wedding-themed "The Rescue") adorned in revealing sequined gowns and sashays aboard the mothership in stiletto heels like a debutant on the set of

Dallas. Although Diana has limited dialogue in the original *V*, the weekly series incarnation of the character hams it up like a comic book villain and regularly engages in heated verbal spats with Lydia.

The series pilot, entitled “Liberation Day,” is set one year after the climactic events of *The Final Battle* in which the surviving resistance characters go their separate ways, and members of the Visitor fifth column such as Willie and Martin attempt to integrate into human society. We are introduced to corrupt corporate mogul Nathan Bates (Lane Smith), who forges a Faustian deal with the Visitors in exchange for alien technology. Bates eventually emerges as the show’s secondary antagonist, filling the void left by the human collaborator characters, including Daniel and Eleanor, who perished in *The Final Battle*. It is revealed that a fleet of Visitor motherships lies hidden on the dark side of the Earth’s moon and is poised to launch a counteroffensive against the resistance. Diana, who escapes custody thanks to interference from Bates, assumes command of the Visitor fleet and launches an all-out second invasion which forces the human heroes from the previous miniseries to band together once again for the sake of freedom. The “red dust” biological weapon that was used as a *deus ex machina* device to topple the Visitors in the climax of *The Final Battle* is rendered obsolete in the weekly series due to the contrived discovery of its long-term hazardous effects on the planet’s ecosystem, allowing the show’s scribes to write the toxic substance out of the script and escape from the corner in which they painted themselves. The so-called Star Child, Elizabeth, undergoes more accelerated growth and matures into a young woman portrayed by Jennifer Cooke. She continues to inexplicably wield supernatural powers and abilities like a Jedi Knight or a sorcerer in a Tolkien novel.

Initially, producers had planned to return *V* to its grittier and somber roots. Braff and staff writer Steven Souza (*Die Hard*) copiously researched vintage war movies depicting Nazi

occupation during the Second World War. “*Casablanca* works well and has great drama,” Souza said in 1996, “because the cafe that Rick has is a neutral ground where the Nazi and the freedom fighters meet on equal ground. So you have very intense scenes between Victor Lazlo, leader of the French underground, and the Nazis. They’re threatening each other, and yet no one pulls out a gun and shoots the other person. This was the political construction of *Casablanca* at the time, and that gives you drama. So I set up a nightclub in the series, analogous to that, to create that situation” (Thomas). However, any attempts to redeem the franchise were undermined by reoccurring platitudes and by-the-numbers sci-fi cliches as evinced in the third episode, “Breakout,” which features a carnivorous subterranean creature called a Crivit that guards a Visitor prison camp like the mythological two-headed hellhound Cerberus. Because of the eight o’clock timeslot, the show’s violence and intensity also had to be scaled back dramatically to satisfy network censors. *V: The Series* scribe Garner Simmons quipped, “Those were the days of the so-called ‘family hour,’ and the network was very concerned that if we had things parents would not allow children to watch, how would they sell Wheaties?”. Executive story consultant David Ambromowitz (*Highlander: The Series*) echoed Simmons’ sentiments: “As a child, I was into Norse myths and science fiction, and I always kept up with it, so I welcomed the opportunity to write it. But I think NBC made a mistake placing it at 8:00 p.m. I would have placed the show at 9:00 and done some more adult themes. That is my only objection, because you couldn’t really show the carnage of war, and things you did on the miniseries you couldn’t do weekly because of the time slot” (Thomas). As Elizabeth’s superpowers mature to near godlike omnipotence, her character development stagnates and declines. Elizabeth becomes little more than a MacGuffin like the eponymous One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* or the Ark of the Covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*; much of the show revolves around Diana competing with Lydia on a weekly basis

to capture the Star Child and exploit her abilities for their own nefarious purposes. In the episode “The Dissident,” Elizabeth is even proclaimed as the “Chosen One,” which is a science fiction and fantasy trope nearly as ancient as the genres themselves.

As the show progresses, so do the science fiction clichés and ham-fisted platitudes. In the Christmas-themed “A Reflection of Terror,” Ham Tyler, who is painted as a cold-blooded mercenary in *The Final Battle*, undergoes a “Christmas miracle” when he develops paternal love for a wayward little girl. Later in that same episode, Diana uses stolen blood samples to biologically engineer an evil clone of Elizabeth (also played by Cooke). The sinister doppelgänger predictably escapes from the Visitor lab and embarks on a rampage before ultimately being subdued by the resistance. In the infamous wedding-themed episode “The Rescue,” the writing staff takes *V* deeper into primetime soap opera territory when scheming Visitor envoy Charles (Duncan Regehr) coerces Diana to take his hand in marriage in a clandestine effort to deport her back to the Visitor home world to bear his children, thus stripping the ruthless Visitor commander of her power (which is the ultimate goal). Jealous of Diana’s betrothal, Lydia slips poison into her nemesis’s ceremonial libation, but Charles imbibes the deadly concoction instead and meets an untimely demise.

The episodic structure of the weekly series is also a detriment to the show’s narrative. Every episode of *V: The Series* adheres to a redundant formula: the duplicitous Diana hatches a crooked scheme to eradicate the human resistance and/or capture Elizabeth to exploit her preternatural abilities. In the end, our intrepid heroes invariably find an innovative way to thwart the Visitors and/or save Elizabeth, and the episodes conclude on a positive note. “I also think one of the problems you have with a show like *V* is that you have a recurring villain who has to lose all the time,” Ambromowitz reflected. He continued, “So, it certainly was difficult to make it

work so that it doesn't appear to be farcical. In the miniseries, the villain could appear to win the battle at the end of the hour. At the end of the weekly hour, the villain had to lose the battle, so, in actuality, what Diana became was a paper tiger. You always knew the good guys would win in the end. That's the way 8:00 television is designed" (Thomas). The episodic format also allowed the network to air reruns out of order since each episode relatively stands on its own with a self-contained beginning, middle, and ending.

The contradictory writing and inconsistency of the show's narrative hampered the series and further diminished its credibility. "The rules kept changing," Blatt said. "You can't say one week that the red dust comes down to Sargos and up from Long Beach so that you have a center area where the action takes place, and the next week the dust is at Point Magoo. This red dust, which made (the Visitors) vulnerable, kept having the rules changed. Not only that, but for other things as well. The bottom line is you've got to set your rules on a show like this and not change them, because the audience gets very nervous when you keep changing the rules. They think you don't know what you're doing—and they're right" (Thomas). The nature of the red dust itself changed dramatically throughout the course of the series. Originally, the biological agent was introduced as an effective weapon against the Visitors. Humans were immune from the toxin, but Visitors quickly succumbed to its virulent effects and hastily evacuated the planet in defeat. In the subsequent weekly series, however, the toxin is retconned to be to be lethal to humans as well, rendering it virtually useless.

As ratings for the embattled show continued their downward spiral, so did its one million dollar weekly budget allotment. NBC slashed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars per episode, resulting in pared-down special effects and the firing of several key members of the cast. Stock footage from the original miniseries continued to be recycled for every episode, and

the Visitors' signature reverberating voices that featured prominently in the previous two miniseries were even removed as a cost-cutting measure. Fan favorite Ham Tyler departs in the twelfth episode along with Robin Maxwell to buttress the Chicago-based resistance movement; Elias is vaporized by a Visitor "death ray" in the episode "The Hero"; scientist Robert Maxwell meets his demise in the episode "Dreadnaught," when he rams a commandeered mothership into a Visitor superweapon in a heroic act of self-sacrifice that mirrors fifth columnist Martin's death in Johnson's aborted *Final Battle* screenplay; Martin himself is murdered by Diana in "Liberation Day"; and corporate megalomaniac Nathan Bates perishes in "The Betrayal." A script entitled "The Return" even features the shocking death of series co-protagonist, Julie Parrish, but the series was cancelled before the scene could be filmed. By the thirteenth episode, the ensemble cast of *V* had become a mere shell of its former self.

However, paring back *V*'s massive cast also enabled the writing staff some creative breathing room. As series writer Garner Simmons explained in 1996:

That was a critical problem, doing a series in which you have twelve or thirteen running characters, all of whom require some sort of screen time. My approach to it was to try and feature each of the major players and stories that would allow for A, B and C-level stories so that a prime story of a given week would involve usually one or two of the good guys and at least one of the bad guys tied into this story. Then you would deal with a second level that would be a subplot and a third level which would be a kind of runner that would surface two or three episodes later. It's very difficult to do that and my personal opinion is that it was a necessity. I wouldn't have created an ongoing series with that many characters, but I had spent the first three seasons on *Falcon Crest* and did the last part of a

season of *Yellow Rose*, so I was used to dealing with large casts and accommodating those kinds of problems and finding ways to make them work. You have to give each of your characters their moment in the sun and then you have to pay attention to all of the other characters at the same time. But there was always something more to do. (Thomas)

Writing off one-third of the human characters enabled the creative staff to dedicate more screen time to the Visitors themselves in stories that expounded on the aliens' cultural heritage and ethnic traditions such as the ritualistic duel to the death between Diana and Lydia in the campy episode "The Champion."

Rather than keep the aliens shrouded in mystery as Johnson demonstrated in his original miniseries, the weekly series showrunners opted to lift the veil on the reptilian antagonists. The hammy exposition surrounding Visitor ceremonial rituals only further diminished the franchise's mystique. The scaling down of the principal cast didn't help bolster the show's fading ratings, either. Taggart later admitted in 1996: "I never thought it should have been a series. I felt it should be a series of miniseries. We would be into 'V, Part Seven' by now. Like Star Trek. You shouldn't do it as a series because you can't maintain the quality. That was my first suggestion. Of course, these are decisions rooted in economics but not what might be creatively best for the show. They decided to ignore that and go to series. That was the first mistake they made" (Thomas). Johnson had never intended *V* to become an episodic series. He used Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as a template in which to introduce and develop such a large cast of disparate characters and unite them in a common narrative by the film's end. Balancing such a massive cast is conducive in a four-hour miniseries, but it was a struggle for an episodic "battle of the week" format like *V: The Series*.

The final-aired episode of *The Series* ends with a whimper rather than a bang. Under orders from their Leader, the Visitors initiate a global ceasefire and halt all hostilities in preparation for the interstellar despot's arrival to Earth. The Leader, the unseen architect of the Visitor invasion, plans to sue for peace and requests a meeting with Elizabeth. There are some Visitors such as the sadistic Diana, however, who disagree with their Leader's sudden change of heart and plot to assassinate the ruler so that the war against humanity can continue. Diana blackmails her henchman James (Judson Scott) into planting an explosive device in the Leader's shuttle shortly before it departs back to the Visitor home world. Minutes after Elizabeth boards the shuttle, her human love interest Kyle Bates (Jeff Yagher) stows away on the doomed craft as it lifts off into space, ending the series on an unresolved cliffhanger. A twentieth episode resolving the cliffhanger was scripted but never aired. Of all the weapons used against the Visitors, it was low ratings that ultimately did them in. NBC mercifully cancelled the suffering series in March 1985 after nineteen episodes, ending what began two years prior as an engaging science fiction epic about humanity's resiliency and resolve. Actress Faye Grant lamented the once flourishing franchise's fall from grace:

My original vision of *V* was something different from what the show became. I'd been with it since its inception, and my idea for it as a series was that it could be sort of like *Mission: Impossible* mixed with a little *Hill Street Blues*—suspense combined with the interrelationships between the main characters. I really thought that it would be more effective if, instead of smashing heads, we used intrigue and disguises and infiltration as our main weapons. Force, inevitably, is necessary sometimes to protect oneself. But the way to get these people off of our planet is to make them leave because they don't want to be here. There are ways to do that

utilizing intrigue and covert operations, which I think are a lot more interesting than car chases. (Thomas)

The human drama that made *V* so endearing and engaging to so many viewers had all but dissipated by the time the effete series finale aired.

Critics lambasted the weekly series for its inept writing and steep decline in quality. For example, in his scathing 2004 retrospective review, Daniel Finney of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* writes: “A TV series with so much promise—based on two successful, highly rated science fiction miniseries on NBC in the early 1980s—produced such a silly, loathsome mess. . . . NBC tried to make a weekly series out of the show so terribly it must surely rank as one of the worst TV sci-fi experiments ever. The cast becomes dangerously unstable. Ironside quits in the middle of the show’s run with no apparent reason. Others are killed without meaning. The special effects are cheapened and the use of stock footage—previously filmed scenes used again and again—is maddening. . . . What was once a pretty decent science fiction saga with good drama, humor and suspense ends up becoming ‘Dynasty’ with lizard makeup and laser guns” (Finney). The low ratings resulted from a host of issues that plagued the series from its inception including the eight o’clock “family hour” timeslot, the tired science fiction clichés, the cardboard characters, soap opera-inspired melodrama, and campy storylines. Each of these deficiencies played a detrimental role in obfuscating and distorting Johnson’s original vision. Had Johnson been allowed to maintain creative control of the franchise, *V* may have had a different fate. When he wrote the original, Johnson knew that science fiction is a more effective storytelling vehicle when it emphasizes human relationships and drama rather than space battles and action scenes.

In the wake of *V*’s cancellation, there were several attempts to resuscitate the dormant science fiction franchise and restore it to its former glory. In 1989, *Babylon 5* creator J. Michael

Straczynski submitted a script to Warner Brothers for a proposed four-hour syndicated miniseries entitled *V: The Next Chapter*. Straczynski's teleplay would have been a darker and grittier reboot set five years after the apparent Visitor truce in the final-aired episode of *V: The Series*. As millions of humans naively celebrate the end of the Visitor occupation, the duplicitous aliens launch a *War of the Worlds*-styled sneak attack that leaves several major cities decimated and scores of people dead. Human sympathizer Willie is executed for treason, and Lydia is killed in a shuttle explosion during the melee. The original big-bad, Diana, is demoted for her repeated failures and reassigned to a new command while the unnamed Visitor Leader himself emerges as the story's new central antagonist. Donovan is captured and transported to the Visitor home planet, and Julie flees to Australia and assumes a new identity. The captured Star Child Elizabeth dies after being dissected on an operating table during a sadistic medical experiment authorized by the Leader. The only returning character from the series that plays an active role in Straczynski's aborted teleplay is Ham Tyler, who helps organize a Chicago-based resistance movement to overthrow the Visitor garrison once and for all. *V: The Next Chapter* would have also introduced a new group of aliens called the "Outsiders," an opposing Visitor faction locked in a centuries-old civil war with the Leader, that arrives on Earth to offer assistance to the beleaguered resistance. It is later revealed that these Outsiders intercepted Julie's encrypted signal for help that had been transmitted via satellite at the end of the original miniseries and have arrived on the scene to answer the call. Although the script received positive feedback, Straczynski's project was ultimately rejected in 1991 because of its exorbitant budget, propelling the *V* franchise into limbo once again. Straczynski has indicated in interviews that he plans to publish his failed teleplay as a novel one day, but that remains to be seen (Conley).

Straczynski wasn't the only television scribe who attempted to resurrect the *V* franchise. Johnson also tried to bring his creation back to life in a proposed four-hour miniseries set twenty years after the original which would have reunited many of the original cast members and paired them with their young descendants as they battled a second Visitor invasion. Johnson became inspired to re-launch *V* while recording the director's commentary on the original miniseries DVD in 2001. When the disc sold nearly three million copies on Amazon, Johnson realized that interest in his science fiction epic had not eroded. "Because the themes and allegories of 'V' were so enduring, they naturally lent themselves to further exploration," Johnson said. "My original brilliant cast and crew helped me to create nuanced characters that people could deeply identify with. Audiences clearly wanted more. And the idea of exploring what the world looked like twenty years later was intriguing to me" (Margulies). However, Johnson's teleplay didn't impress the NBC brass, and the network instead shopped the script to the Sci-Fi (now called Syfy) Channel, but it too passed on the project, citing that the proposed sequel was too derivative of the original (Green). NBC instead opted to remake *V* from the ground up, prompting a determined Johnson to instead turn his proposed sequel script into a novel entitled *V: The Second Generation*, which was published in February 2008. As Johnson recalled in a 2008 interview:

I sold the idea of a new miniseries, *V: The Second Generation*, to NBC in 2002. Alas, it was not like working with Brandon [Tartikoff]. Years passed. They even had me write a second miniseries screenplay to remake my original mini, which was to air first. But while NBC dawdled, long-form TV waned. So I arranged a publishing deal and wrote a novel of "V: The Second Generation" to help spark the project along. The book was well received and got some lovely reviews, but my miniseries remained unproduced because virtually all the

outlets for minis dried up—except for the SciFi Channel, who wanted to make it, but Warners has been unable to make a deal with them on any project.

(Margulies)

Johnson's novel is set approximately twenty-five years after the 1983 original *V* and disregards the events that transpire in *The Final Battle* and weekly television series. The story revisits several of the original characters and their descendants as they continue their struggles against the Visitors, who have pillaged nearly half of the Earth's water supply. Like in Straczynski's proposed sequel, the resistance's interstellar distress signal is finally answered by an insectoid race of beings called the *Zedti*, who are the sworn enemies of the Visitors. "When I was putting together the DVD [of the original] for Warner Home Video, the last scene had [Juliet Parish] sending a message to deep space hoping that the enemy of my enemy is my friend," Johnson said in 2008. "And I thought, what if I picked up the story 20 years later to see what happened?" (Owen).

Johnson's novel explores some of the themes he had originally intended for the television sequels of the original miniseries had he retained his position as showrunner with NBC. Visitors and humans have integrated into an alternate society, where their biracial offspring (pejoratively referred to as "Dregs") are ostracized as second-class citizens. Bearing both reptilian and human physical traits, the Dregs' struggle for social acceptance echoes the plight of the Newcomers in *Alien Nation*. Both races share the bottom tier of the social ladder and are forced to take minimal low-wage jobs to live their beleaguered lives in dilapidated ghettos. The 2008 novel also features two openly gay characters, which is a first for the *V* franchise and reflects the twenty-first century's more socially tolerant zeitgeist. In addition, the novel reveals Diana to be bisexual, which is a facet only vaguely touched upon in the original miniseries but never fully explored during America's

more conservative 1980s under Reagan. “Watch my 1983 original carefully—there’s a scene where Diana circles behind Christine and traces her fingertips across the back of Christine's neck while talking about how pleeeeed she was . . . *personally*,” Johnson wrote in a 2015 email. “I always intended for Diana to be a creature of many appetites . . . and at the very least bisexual, which is exactly the direction I gave to Jane when we were shooting,” he explained (Johnson interview). The novel was positively received by fans, although many of whom expressed disappointment about the book’s lack of continuity with *The Final Battle*. Warner Brothers, meanwhile, had a different plan to reintroduce the *V* saga to a new generation of viewers.

One of the main challenges from a marketing standpoint was how to make *V* relevant again for a contemporary audience. The Cold War was over, and the threat of a totalitarian invasion from the Soviet Union had abated. However, like a fleet of Visitor motherships, inspiration for a retelling of *V* came from the skies. On the morning of September 11, 2001, the face of America’s enemy had changed, and so did the Visitors themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: TERRORISTS FROM OUTER SPACE

Although Johnson made several attempts to resuscitate *V*, the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent end of the Cold War in 1991 expunged the West's enemies abroad, so American television audiences lost interest in despotic totalitarian villains who threaten democracy. With no credible adversary or international boogiemán to pit against the U.S., allegorical fascist invaders from far reaches of space no longer elicited the same gravitas as they did in the 1980s. However, the events of September 11, 2001 unfortunately gave the West a different kind of foe. In the turbulent years that followed the worst terrorist attack ever committed on U.S. soil, the ominous shadow of a new enemy cast itself over the hearts and minds of American television audiences: *Al-Qaida*. The late 1990s and early twenty-first century also heralded sensationalized mass shootings such as the Columbine and Virginia Tech massacres. One of the most unnerving aspects about these new threats was that the assailants could be anyone or anywhere at any given time and could go about their business without being detected. Terrorists and would-be mass shooters lived amongst us, and they looked, acted, and talked like everyone else. Everyone—our next-door neighbors, the milk man, airline pilots, pharmacists, teachers, and even soldiers or political figures—was a potential suspect. There were no uniforms or flags to distinguish these shadowy new adversaries, and paranoia unparalleled since the height of the Cold War became rampant. The line separating good and evil became opaque. And it was in this volatile political climate that *V* made its return to television.

V in a Post-9/11 World

Politics has played an instrumental role in both incarnations of *V*, but the two depictions of the alien invaders convey very different political dichotomies that ultimately lead to the same megalomaniacal plan: world conquest. Both versions of the show were reflections of the zeitgeists from whence they came, and in this chapter I will contrast the political themes espoused in the 2009 *V* reboot with the sociopolitical motifs in the original and explain how contemporary events molded their respective narratives. In addition, I will examine how the incorporation of science fiction conventions helped the creators of *V* (the original and the remake) convey their political messages to a broader audience.

Producer Scott Peters (*The 4400*) took on the monumental task of reintroducing *V* to a post-9/11 audience that had become enraptured with dark, gritty serialized television. “We wanted to make sure as we moved forward that we made sure that we honored and respected the characters and the themes that that show envisioned and tried not to step on those and introduced brand new characters and brand new themes that would make sense in a post-9/11 world,” Peters acknowledged in 2009 (Schneider). Due to a dispute filed with the Writers Guild of America by Johnson, production of the rebooted series was temporarily halted in August 2009. Warner Brothers executives claimed that since the new *V* deviated so radically from Johnson’s source material, the original creator should not have been credited for it. Fortunately for Johnson, the Writers Guild disagreed, and Johnson retained the “created by” credit (Hinman). The plot of the re-imagined *V*, which debuted on the ABC network on November 3, 2009, mirrors its iconic 1980s predecessor: A massive fleet of alien starships appears in Earth’s skies and strategically positions itself over twenty-nine major cities across the globe. The leader of the Visitors, Anna (*Firefly* and *Homeland*’s Morena Baccarin), announces that her people have “come in peace” and

are in need of some of Earth's minerals in order to engineer a chemical that will save the Visitor home world. As time passes, the Visitors use their advanced technology to ameliorate many of Earth's medical ailments such as cancer and blindness. As these Visitor "miracles" grow more and more grandiose, some impressionable people begin to view their alien guests as divine beings or intergalactic messiahs sent to Earth by God to save humanity from certain doom. As in the original miniseries, a contingent of skeptical detractors begin to question the Visitors' ulterior motives, especially series protagonist Erica Evans (Elizabeth Mitchell), an FBI agent whose troubled teenage son, Tyler (Logan Huffman), becomes romantically involved with Anna's daughter, Lisa (Laura Vandervoort). In the pilot episode of the rebooted series, Anna agrees to speak with only those members of the press who present her people in a positive light. When protests against the Visitors begin to emerge, Anna reassures her handpicked journalists that "embracing change is never easy. But the reward for doing so can be far greater than you can ever imagine." The Visitor leader's attempts to assuage the unsettled human populace are only partially successful. A resistance movement led by Erica and comprising the dashing Father Jack Landry (Joel Gretsch), who questions his Catholic faith, rogue Visitor Ryan Nichols (Morris Chestnut), and mercenary Kyle Hobbes (Charles Mesure), is eventually formed to expose the truth behind the Visitors' presence on Earth. The new Visitor arrival appears more innocuous than the intergalactic visit their uniformed predecessors made in 1983. Gone are the laser rifle-toting shock troopers and Nazi-like regalia that epitomized the Visitors in Johnson's miniseries. These twenty-first century Visitors practice a less militaristic and intimidating approach by adorning themselves in civilian attire and assuming a more tame and benevolent disposition.

According to Heather Urbanski, although both incarnations of *V* feature female human resistance leaders, the reboot's protagonist is better equipped to fight the Visitors due to her law enforcement background:

The *V* narratives, meanwhile, show related, though distinct, transformations in the human female lead characters who head the resistance . . . the original *V* miniseries portrayed a significant transformation in the actant of Juliet Parrish, the medical student who becomes, slowly and oftentimes reluctantly, the leader of a guerilla resistance against the Visitors. Her counterpart in the reboot, Erica Evans, is better equipped for this role (being an FBI agent) and less reluctant, but that doesn't mean the transformation is smooth. (130)

When she has to trade in her microscope for a machine gun, Julie struggles to find her inner courage to lead the ragtag band of resistance fighters against the insurmountable might of the Visitors. As the original miniseries progresses, Julie slowly gains confidence in her leadership abilities as more and more people look to her for guidance. Erica, meanwhile, is depicted as a tough and battle-hardened FBI agent from the beginning. With little hesitation, Erica takes the reigns of the resistance and leads her people in a bloody conflict against the invaders. The hardboiled agent even blurs ethical lines much like Jack Bauer in an episode of *24* (2001-2010) when she resorts to torturing captured Visitors in order to extract information, ignoring protests from her fellow resistance members.

Erica also frequently engages in violent and reckless shootouts against her enemies like a seasoned soldier. In the second season episode "Siege," she decides to go on the offensive against the invaders rather than wait for Anna to attack. "We're going to rain hell on the Visitors," the resistance leader vows menacingly. The reboot's far less innocent portrayal of its

protagonist conforms to the darker and edgier ways in which twenty-first century television presents its characters to cynical audiences longing for grittier television dramas that don't downplay or simplify human flaws or embrace "Mary Sue" protagonists. Erica is what film researcher Lynnette Porter describes as the "tarnished hero":

SF heroes and villains in the early 2000s are not as clearly oppositional as yesteryear's definition of traditional heroes might indicate. Modern SF TV heroes aren't always noble or pure, but audiences still can distinguish the "good guys" from the "bad guys," even if the "good guys" occasionally drift into some morally dangerous territory. As well, audience expectations for "bad guys" may have become almost clichéd, especially when they refer to common depictions of the villain's base, where all sorts of evil plots are hatched, as well as the expected conversations illustrating the evil character. (32)

While Julie is painted as a pure, innocent and reluctant scientist who is forced to take up arms in the original *V*, her twenty-first century counterpart is a gruff, independent and rugged cop who isn't above engaging in morally ambiguous acts to attain what she wants, as evinced in the Season Two episode "Laid Bare," in which Erica authorizes the brutal skinning of a captured Visitor spy in order to extract information from her.

As mentioned above, the Visitors themselves are given a twenty-first century update as well. The "V's" (to which they're referred in the rebooted series) are eventually revealed to be reptilian as they are in the original, but their human skin masks are composed of organic (in lieu of synthetic latex) materials, indicating a more symbiotic biological relationship with their disguises. Urbanski contemplates this matter in her book *The Science Fiction Reboot: Canon, Innovation and Fandom in Refashioned Franchises*:

While we still had not seen alien lizards without their “skins” at the conclusion of the first season of the rebooted television series, viewers learned within the first two hours of the original miniseries exactly what the Visitors looked like without their camouflage. Instead of the original aliens’ human mask, constructed with what appeared to be a latex material just like that used in the film industry, and true reptilian skin underneath, viewers of the reboot had only seen glimpses of lizard skin through openings in what appeared to be organic human tissue throughout the first twelve episodes. (35)

Unlike the original incarnation of the Visitors, who removed their false human disguises at will, the human skins that mask the invaders in the reboot are essential to their survival. Skinning a Visitor in the reboot is tantamount to a death sentence. Anna sentences several of her people to suffer this grisly fate as punishment for their transgressions and failures throughout the series.

The Visitor motherships in the reboot also differ significantly from the austere saucer-shaped industrial and utilitarian vessels piloted by their 1980s colleagues. The interstellar ships in the reboot appear varied in their designs with more luxurious and inviting interiors like space-faring five-star hotels or futuristic cruise ships. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect about these new Visitors is that their dramatic arrival in the pilot episode didn’t mark their first sojourn to Earth. It is revealed that these Visitors had landed decades ago in order to infiltrate the human race and have been living amongst us for decades within “sleeper cells” which have penetrated governments, organized religions, educational systems, and general populations. In the tradition of Moore’s rebooted *Battlestar Galactica*, which borrows a similar theme, the visitors’ infiltration of the human race exemplifies the mass panic and paranoia of a post-9/11 world.

Before the pilot episode begins, a line of text appears on the screen that reads: “Where were you on 9/11?” The show immediately establishes a link to the infamous terror attacks that traumatized the nation and connects it to the arrival of the Visitors, heralding an earth-shattering event that will forever alter the course of human history. Urbanski contrasts the difference between the original Visitors and their reimagined descendants in the 2009 reboot:

The *V* television series’ visual descriptions at the costume level also differentiate the reboot from the original. While in the 1980s miniseries the Visitors were hardly if ever seen out of uniform, the leaders of the Vs (in particularly the supreme leader, Anna, and her second in command, Marcus) wear American business attire in nearly every scene. For fans of the narrative, this change in description highlights what seems to be a more profound change in the aliens as they are more media and perception savvy than their fictional predecessors. While most of this distinction goes unremarked in the series (left up to the viewer to interpret the background information of costuming), the Visitor understanding of the connection between appearance and reception is directly referenced in the second episode, “There is No Normal Anymore,” when Anna is considering what to wear while addressing the Japanese people and eventually decides on a kimono because she’s been told “in Japan this conveys both a respect for tradition and allure of submission.” (36)

The classic Visitors were easy to spot because of their overt fascist and militaristic attire. In the reboot, there are no swastikas, no helmeted shock troopers, jackboots, nor coveralls to differentiate them from their human subjects. The aliens in the reboot are adorned in conventional human clothing and essentially appear like everyone else, augmenting a sense of

distrust and paranoia among the humans much like the fear of terrorist sleeper cells living in the West like the September 11 hijackers who attended flight school and exercised in a local gym. The new Visitors also adhere to a hive-like societal hierarchy, with Anna serving as a queen and matriarch who oversees the various castes including laborers, administrators, and warriors. Every Visitor reverently refers to Anna as “my queen,” denoting a sense of parentage. It is revealed that Anna gave birth to the legions of Visitors aboard the motherships like a queen bee ruling her brood.

In her comparative study of the rebooted *V* and the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen suggests that because of their “otherness,” aliens in science fiction films and novels underscore what it means to be human because they highlight differences between “us” and “the others.” Extraterrestrials traditionally “represent what is not human in order to exemplify that which is human,” she notes. “However, the genre also undercuts these differences, as the competing tradition has been to use aliens to hold up a mirror to humanity by highlighting the corruption of Western society” (Koistinen 251). Echoing Don Siegel’s 1956 science fiction classic *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Peters’ updated interpretation of the Visitors includes their ability to emulate humanity to the point where the line separating human and alien becomes blurred. “Keeping in mind the threat created by proximity, [the Visitors] become repulsive because they cannot be recognized as the other within a mostly white community,” Koistinen contends. “This can be read as expressing fears about racial passing and, for example, terrorist infiltration” (255). In the vintage series, the Visitors exhibited physical characteristics that distinguished them from humans such as customized sunglasses to protect against Earth’s sunlight, and their alien voices reverberated robotically. In the retelling, however,

the Visitors exhibit no such physical attributes, forcing us to look deeper than skin to determine if they're human or not (255).

The *V* remake is an extension of what Stacy Takacs deems as America's "politics of fear" in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. While the original *V* and other science fiction programs in the 1970s and 1980s reflected society's wariness concerning power, vulnerability, and the age of globalization, Takacs argues that televised science fiction in the post-9/11 world exemplifies a heightened mood of paranoia, anxiety, and the demonization of "the other." Takacs breaks "politics of fear" into two tiers: "a tendency to link fear to concerns about racial others" and "a tendency toward apocalypticism that links terror and destruction to hopes for social renewal." The *V* reboot implements both categories to engender its post-9/11 allegory. The reptilian nature of the Visitors augments their alien qualities and sense of otherness, and their clandestine plot to ensnare humanity facilitates the apocalypticism in which Takacs describes. Although dramas such as *24* played an instrumental role in dramatizing the war on terror, Takacs contends that science fiction provides writers with an opportunity to address real-world issues with more scrutiny:

On TV, military dramas (*JAG*, *Over There*, *The Unit*), political thrillers (*24*, *The Agency*, *Threat Matrix*, *The Grid*), crime dramas (*Crossing Jordan*, *Missing*, the *Law and Order* franchises), and forensics programs (*Bones*, the *CSI* franchises) have played an important role in clarifying the moral stakes of the war on terrorism. Relying on reflective standards of realism, these genres are loathe to exceed or challenge the established bounds of discourse and so usually reinforce the Bush administration's depiction of the war on terrorism as a "monumental struggle between good and evil." [. . .] Science fiction, on the other hand, works

through displacement. The absorption of real-world issues into the realm of fantasy permits social problems to be examined more carefully and resolved in potentially unexpected ways. Because of its relatively marginal social status, the genre is freer to express ideas suppressed in the political public sphere. (Takacs)

Johnson realized science fiction's marketable potential when he encountered friction from skittish network executives while pitching the original premise for *V*. When the NBC brass bristled at the idea of a fascist takeover of the United States, they were more receptive to presenting the fascists as interstellar invaders to avoid any potentially sensitive subject matter such as the systematic demonization of an ethnic minority (e.g., the oppressed scientists are analogous to Jews or African Americans). A science fiction miniseries also enabled NBC to attract a broader audience in the wake of the success of the *Star Wars* trilogy, and Johnson was still able to imbue his text with hard-hitting sociopolitical themes by adapting them for the typical 1980s television viewer. In the case of the rebooted *V*, the ongoing war on terror is a polemic issue that continues to foment controversy and political divisiveness among Americans. According to John Sides and Kimberly Gross, negative Muslim stereotypes portrayed in the media potentially lead to more public support for harsher "improvised" interrogation techniques of terrorist suspects and cause Americans to dehumanize followers of Islam (17). Vilifying a religion such as Islam is much different than demonizing an extremist political ideology like fascism. Instead, extremist terrorist sleeper cells in the *V* reboot are metaphorically portrayed as aliens to avoid potential controversy and sensitive subject matter.

Political allegory is nothing new to *V*; the science fiction franchise was tailor-made to accommodate it. However, instead of basing the story and characters on classic literature and historical events as Johnson did, the remake was based on news headlines and topical events.

One of the more controversial political interpretations of the re-imagined *V* was not its allegorical depiction of terrorists but its alleged barbed critique of the Obama administration (Gavin). In 2009, online message boards were set ablaze with heated debate about the show's supposed references to Barack Obama's 2008 election and his subsequent efforts to create a universal healthcare package. In his article "V Aims at Obamamania," the *Chicago Tribune's* Glenn Gavin elucidated such parallels:

Imagine this. At a time of political turmoil, a charismatic, telegenic new leader arrives virtually out of nowhere. He offers a message of hope and reconciliation based on compromise and promises to marshal technology for a better future that will include universal health care. The news media swoons in admiration – one simpering anchorman even shouts at a reporter who asks a tough question: "Why don't you show some respect?!" The public is likewise smitten, except for a few nutcases who circulate batty rumors on the Internet about the leader's origins and intentions. The leader, undismayed, offers assurances that are soothing, if also just a tiny bit condescending: "Embracing change is never easy." So, does that sound like anyone you know? Oh, wait – did I mention the leader is secretly a totalitarian space lizard who's come here to eat us? (Gavin)

Gavin likens the Visitor leader Anna to Obama in terms of her charisma, overtures for "hope and change," and appeal to younger demographics; however, due to Anna's duplicitous actions, Gavin's analysis also implies that the series suggests there may be a shadier side to the charismatic young president which American voters may have overlooked due to their own political bias and desire for change.

Although Baccarin acknowledged that she had researched the mannerisms and orations of actual politicians for her role as the suave and icy Visitor queen, the actress stopped short of citing Obama as a direct influence. “I am trying my best [in the role] to be as trustworthy as I can be and to embody what everybody of every nationality and need wants to see,” she said. “At the same time, you have your own agenda” (de Moraes). Peters, meanwhile, remained coy about his reimagined series’s apparent political subtext:

We are not looking to put any sort of agenda onto the table, but you know, I wake up in the morning and you look at the news and you see there’s wars; there’s new diseases being discovered; there’s old diseases that we are still dealing with. The economy is in the toilet; there are people losing their homes. Wouldn’t it be awesome if 29 ships showed up and they all said, “We’ve got this. We’ll take care of you. Don’t worry about it”? Shows are open to interpretation. People bring subjective thoughts to it [. . .] but there is no particular agenda. People will bring to it what they bring to it. [. . .] If one group wants to claim it as their show and another group wants to claim it as their show, that’s their prerogative. (de Moraes)

Despite the prevaricating nature of the show’s producers on the matter, the parallels between the Obama administration and the Visitors are difficult to disregard. After all, the rebooted series premiered on the one-year anniversary of Obama’s first election, and the aliens’ pledges for “hope,” “change,” and “universal healthcare” mirror the American president’s own political platform in 2008. However, Koistinen cautions that such a superficial interpretation could potentially oversimplify the series: “The re-imagined as well as the original versions of [both *Battlestar Galactica* and *V*] offer, in addition to entertainment, more than mere allegorical critiques of American politics. To today’s viewer, the fear of otherness discussed in these series

can also resonate with broader contemporary phenomena such as terrorism, hate speech, and xenophobia all around the world” (Koistinen 260).

Some political bloggers pointed out several lines of dialogue that paralleled statements made by Obama’s staff members such as what Sarah McCoy noted in 2010: “For example, in one episode about a natural disaster that the V’s intervene to solve, Anna tells a news reporter, ‘There’s tragedy every day, all over your world—so many opportunities to help.’ Likewise, Obama’s Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel is quoted as saying, ‘Never let a serious crisis go to waste...it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before’” (McCoy). Although Peterson’s *V* appropriated a more contemporary approach to its narrative, the franchise’s root themes about power and resistance still resonate and endure throughout the first season. In the reboot, we still see a resistance movement composed of disparate individuals from all walks of life who join together in order to thwart an alien menace that uses the media to dupe and beguile gullible humans.

Though the rebooted *V* initially garnered robust ratings, the series began to hemorrhage viewers in its second and final season as the show began to delve into the inane platitudes of its 1985 predecessor by eschewing the edgy political allegory and verisimilitude that attracted viewers in the first season and supplanting them with rote science fiction tropes and by-the-numbers clichés. For the second season, the studio replaced Peters with Scott Rosenbaum (NBC’s *Chuck*) as the showrunner, and the series dialed back much of its political allegory and replaced it with more action sequences and recycled science fiction plot devices (Abrams). One of the more anti-climactic and convoluted subplots of the soporific second season stemmed from the revelation of the Visitors’ master plan itself. Instead of an elaborate and insidious plot to purloin Earth’s natural resources, the reimagined Visitors come to Earth in order to harvest

human DNA and incorporate it into their own gene pool to expedite their evolution. The so-called miracle flu vaccines the Visitors bestowed to humans are revealed to have been tainted with a biological agent that enables the aliens to track human subjects with the most promising genetics for mating purposes. Fertile Visitor members of the opposite sex are then assigned to seduce these human candidates in the hopes of passing the prized DNA to their progeny.

Critics and fans began to ridicule the second season's propensity for over-the-top plotting and shallow characters. For example, in the second-season episode "Unholy Alliance," Anna investigates the mysteries surrounding the human soul and even conducts medical experiments to extract it like an appendix. The new show also introduces a hybrid Visitor-human child named Amy, who grows at an accelerated rate much like the infamous "Star Child" in the 1980s weekly series. Amy begins to exhibit preternatural abilities like her Reagan-era counterpart and becomes a pawn in Anna's machinations against Earth, echoing the relationship between Elizabeth and Diana a generation earlier. The reimaged series even regurgitates the "evil twin" plot device in the episode "Mother's Day," repeating the same cliché in which the 1980s show notoriously implemented with the evil Elizabeth doppelgänger. Whereas the original Visitors insidiously exploited humankind's own prejudices and predilection for wealth and power, the reimaged Visitors resort to using cartoony doomsday devices to gain their foothold on the planet. For example, Anna wields a hokey psychic energy called "bliss" that intoxicates its recipients and gives them a sense of euphoria through the stimulation of endorphins. Throughout the second season, it is implied that this telekinetic power enables Anna to keep her subjects in check by making them dependent on her bliss, like drug addicts.

There are several reasons why the *V* reboot met an untimely demise. The new series failed to capture the essence of what made Johnson's original miniseries so endearing for

viewers. Huw Turbervill of *The Daily Telegraph* lamented that the new incarnation of the Visitors lacks the menace and ominous presence of the intergalactic reptilian fascists in the original:

Although “sleeper” aliens had infiltrated society, there was less a sense of menace in this new version. The plainly-attired aliens were very much on their ships and living apart from us, whereas in the original series, the visitors, in their distinctive blood-red uniforms replete with Swastika-style logos, seemed everywhere. They “converted” (brainwashed) scientists and politicians; their troops gradually assumed the duties of our soldiers and policemen; their spokespeople and leaders made – and told us – the news and were clearly calling the shots. They did not need to invade – they had assumed control by stealth. Even if we wanted to reject them, the visitors were here to stay and looked unstoppable . . . until they started choking on the dust. The original series was thematically far more powerful. The visitors were clearly the Nazis, the friendly aliens were a take on the fifth column from World War Two, and infatuated young humans who signed up to work for the aliens were the Hitler Youth. There were human collaborators, a la Vichy France, who buried their heads in the sand, seduced by visitors like Steven (a chilling portrayal by the superb Andrew Prine).

As Turbervill noted, the rebooted series failed to capture the essence of what made Johnson’s *V* so timeless. “Being shown primetime to an American audience more used to *Desperate Housewives*, *House* and *Mad Men* and perhaps wary of sci-fi,” he wrote, “we saw too much politicking and not enough lizards!”

As ratings tanked, producers attempted to salvage the moribund series by bringing back veteran *V* actors Marc Singer and Jane Badler, but viewership continued to slide. Singer appears in the series finale as a covert government agent who's suspicious of the Visitors; and Badler portrays Anna's imprisoned mother and the deposed queen of the Visitors. However, much to the chagrin and disappointment of loyal *V* fans, Badler and Singer were given very little to do, and their cameos only functioned as a fan service. The pilot episode drew more than fourteen million viewers on November 3, 2009, making it the most-watched debut of that season. The show's inaugural four episodes scored an average of 9.75 million viewers and a 3.4 rating among the coveted eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-old demographic. The second half of the first season, however, drew only 5.72 million viewers and a 2.3 rating for the eighteen to forty-nine-year-old demographic. The series limped into a second season but finished with an average rating of 6.93 million viewers per episode before ultimately being cancelled (Gorman).

The series ends on an unresolved cliffhanger with the fate of the human race in the balance. After an attempted coup on Anna by a host of dissenting Visitors led by her mother Diana, Anna impales the former queen with her tail and imprisons her daughter, Lisa. Anna then lays an egg that hatches to reveal the aforementioned Lisa doppelgänger within, which seduces and mates with Erica's teenage son, Tyler (Logan Huffman), to harness the boy's prized DNA. The teenager is then murdered by the evil twin as the real Lisa watches in horror from the confines of her imprisonment in the bowls of the mothership. The Visitor-human hybrid child Amy betrays and murders her alien father (Morris Chestnut) and embraces Anna as her mother. Erica, meanwhile, joins the ranks of Project Aries, a top-secret government organization led by Lars Tremon (Singer) that plans to launch a counter-offensive against the alien invaders. The final scene of the series features Amy "blissing" the entire human population at the behest of

Anna, putting Earth's billions of inhabitants under her control. The cliffhanger would never be resolved. ABC officially announced *V*'s cancellation on Friday, May 13, 2011. Despite a tenacious letter-writing campaign launched by ardent fans to salvage the show, *V* disappeared from television for the second time (D'Orazio).

Critical Reaction

Reviews for the reimaged science fiction series were tepid at best. In his "D+" critique of the second season episode "Laid Bare," television critic Simon Abrams acknowledged *V*'s potential but felt the rebooted show became marred by missed opportunities, and the writers never fully developed any of their characters or myriad of ideas they brought forth in the script. "'Laid Bare' is yet another example of how the new *V* does, in fact, have ideas, but none of them are well-developed—at all," he wrote. "These ideas could be potentially interesting, but there's no thought, nor is there any great care put into them. That, more than anything else, is why I continue to watch *V* and am always rewarded for my irrational interest with frustration: The show isn't fundamentally rotten, just especially ill-conceived. Unfortunately, that remains the best thing I can honestly say about the show as it stands at present" (Abrams).

Critic David Wiegand complained about the show's inept dialogue. "The groan-worthy dialogue, usually spoken in a monotone by alien and human alike, is rarely credible and lacks the kind of self-aware irony that might make this enjoyable," he wrote. "In a couple of weeks, PBS will introduce a new quartet of its *Pioneers of Television* documentaries with a look at the early science-fiction shows, including Irwin Allen's goofy *Lost in Space*. The writing in *V* is almost as bad as the howlers in *Lost in Space*, but with one major difference: Allen was intentionally going

for campiness, but there's not a bit of even the accidental variety in *V*. Where is *Mystery Science Theater 3000* now that we need it?" (Wiegand).

Time critic James Poniewozik lambasted the series for its cardboard characters and stale writing: "Now fully under the leadership of Scott Rosenbaum, the new episodes seem flashier, more willing to show a little lizardy leg and reveal more about what's under the skin (or, above, the bones) of the alien Visitors. But the new looks at Visitor society are at turns silly and clichéd—they fear our human *emotions!*—and the premiere elicited too many unintentional laughs" (Poniewozik).

Anthony Ocasio of the website Screen Rant echoed other critics' sentiments:

For most of its second season, *V* was focused on progressing the illogical sub-plot of extracting the human soul. Even within the world of sci-fi, this elemental absurdity proved itself to be the red herring to those watching that something was amiss with the execution of the series. Taking an alien race that is more advanced than humans and exploring their ignorance in relation to humanity as a whole is an intriguing notion, but when one decides to follow a plotline that has no logical conclusion, it proves to alienate your core audience. When it was revealed that Anna could use her "bliss" on humans, the poorly realized soul-extraction plot was effectively dead. For the purpose of attempting to progress the overall series storyline forward, this move was a success. For those who invested hours in watching such a meaningless addition, there's no other way to describe their time commitment than to say it was a waste. (Ocasio)

While the rebooted series introduces several interesting ideas, most of them are never fully developed or executed effectively.

Some critics speculated the *V* remake failed to win over audiences due to its alleged anti-Obama rhetoric, which divided audiences during an already divisive period in American politics. As television critic Mary McNamara posits, “The original *V* drew obvious connections between the Visitors and the Nazis, and much has been made over the possible anti-Obama sentiment of this *V*. The instant adoration, the attractiveness and rhetorical skills of Anna, the idea that the Visitors will woo us with universal healthcare and then destroy us all seem a right-wingish take on the president’s ascendancy” (McNamara). The most coveted Nielsen rating demographic comprises the 18-to-24-year olds, and according to a Gallup poll conducted in 2012, 59 percent of 18-to-29-year olds supported Obama during the November 2012 presidential election (Newport). The Third Reich-inspired invaders in the original *V* are clearly an antagonist against which both the right and the left could join forces to fight. Nothing inspires more scorn than Nazis, and both liberals and conservatives share a mutual hatred for their fascist rhetoric. The rebooted series, however, assumes a more abstract approach to convey its narrative by introducing Visitor terrorist cells who deceive a gullible populace with Obama-inspired overtures for “hope and change.” In its efforts to become topical, hip, and contemporary, the new *V* did more to divide audiences than unite them.

One of the most crucial missing components from ABC’s contemporary retelling of *V* is the classic literary influences that shaped much of Johnson’s writing. There was a great emphasis on computer-generated special effects (especially in the nadir that marked the second season), action, and romantic entanglements, but the essence of what made Johnson’s *V* so endearing was its human drama. The original *V* saw an insidious fascist takeover of the United States inspired by the Lewis’s 1935 political satire *It Can’t Happen Here* (see Chapter One) which became a best seller when it was first published. The reason why Lewis’s novel and Johnson’s miniseries

resonated with so many audiences was due in large part to their verisimilitude. The sociopolitical themes espoused in *V* resonated in the 1930s as much as they did in the 1980s during the Cold War. Contemporary readers of Lewis's novel witnessed firsthand the rise of fascism in Europe and its devastating effects in the Pacific. The Visitors may have been interstellar reptilian conquerors in Johnson's miniseries, but they have existed in many forms throughout history. When Lewis's novel debuted, the Visitors were the fascist Germans, Italians, and Japanese; in the 1960s, they came in the form of white segregationists who kept African Americans out of public schools in the South; from 1949 to 1994, the Visitors were the white Afrikaners in South Africa who enforced Apartheid; from 1963 to 1991, they were the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. In short, every society has experienced oppression in one form or another, whether it's a military junta terrorizing Central America, sexism in the workplace, or simply school bullying on a playground. Johnson knew such a theme would resonate on a personal level with audiences because of its timeless relevance. "I think there's a timeless quality about *V*. . . . Because it's not a story that goes away," Johnson remarked in 2011. "It's a story that has its foundations all the way back in Spartacus, and the revolt of the slaves. It's about an oppressed people living under a totalitarian regime, and how that power affects people. . . . And that's what the essence of *V* was" (Sunday).

Hard science fiction was never *V*'s strong suit, even at its apex under the creative guidance of Johnson. The reboot began to recycle the facile science fiction clichés and contrivances that Johnson had carefully endeavored to avoid in 1983. He merely used such conventions as allegorical tools to deliver the real meat of his story. When he penned the original *V*, Johnson had no interest in creating a hard science fiction film like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* or Robert Wise's *The Andromeda Strain*. His objective was to adapt a modern

retelling of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* and disguise it as an alien invasion piece in order to reach a broader audience. "Science fiction is a wonderful area of speculative fiction to work in because you can work with allegory and metaphor," Johnson said, "and do some classic things, actually, under the guise of a more contemporary-feeling piece. Again, I think it comes out of the sort of classical education that I had at Carnegie Mellon, which was designed to help us understand the classical underpinnings of any sort of drama, whether it was Sophocles or Shakespeare or Ibsen or Tennessee Williams or whomever, and I was trying to follow that credo as I was creating the work that I had done, so that there was always something working underneath the surface, a substantive layer underneath the commercial appeal" (Johnson interview).

By eliminating the sociopolitical subtext and supplanting it with hokey pseudoscience and convoluted storytelling, the reimagined *V* series alienated the franchise's established fanbase. Because of its historical relevance, there's something more disturbing about systematic oppression than campy doomsday devices or "bliss." The *V* reboot essentially became more about glib science fiction clichés than stirring political allegory, which Johnson considered anathema to his original premise. The original Visitors didn't need death rays or mass hypnosis to take over the planet; they implemented a simpler yet more effective weapon: television. By manipulating the media, the invaders are able to control our thought processes and exploit humanity's own weaknesses. By slandering their enemies and fabricating a scientific conspiracy, the Visitors are able to turn humanity against itself so that we become our own worst enemy. Once the Visitors control the media, they essentially control the world. Johnson recognized the power television wields over the public and used that very media to convey his cautionary tale.

Johnson, who had no involvement with the rebooted series aside from the aforementioned “created by” credit, joined in the chorus of critics who felt the 2009 version lacked the panache of his iconic original:

I only saw the pilot which was only very loosely based on my original and thankfully contained none of my original characters or storylines. I thought it missed the mark on almost all levels and certainly was not my cup of tea. In the second week of the 2009 series, almost a third of the audience fell away and the ratings continued to plummet from week to week in what *Fortune* magazine described as a “precipitous decline.” ABC pulled the show after four weeks. They claimed that the series had “always been designed to air in a number of smaller such ‘pods,’” but Hollywood insiders knew bullshit when they heard it. The truth was reported to me by people at the network and involved with the show: it was yanked because ABC was gravely disappointed with the scripts that were being written. The exec producer/showrunner was fired along with many on the writing staff and a new bunch came aboard. Four months later the series went back on – this time with ABC's highest-rated show, *Lost*, giving it a substantial lead-in. But – oops – the ratings for *V* were *lower* than when they'd gone off in the fall. It was a disaster for ABC. [. . .] The pattern was exactly the same as when NBC tried to resurrect my other creation *The Bionic Woman* a year earlier: prompted by an eight-million dollar ad campaign and a brand name title that was fondly remembered by legions of viewers there was a big tune-in the first night. But the second week a third of the audience went away and after seven episodes the series was canceled. Clearly there was a vast audience eager to see a series titled

either *Bionic Woman* or *V* – but they simply did not like nor want the versions that were being served up to them. (Johnson interview)

As previously noted, Johnson announced that he still owned and controlled the motion picture rights to *V* and is working diligently to resurrect the franchise yet again as a theatrical film that would adhere more faithfully to his original vision. Whether he can accomplish that feat in light of the failed ABC series remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION:

JOHNSON'S LEGACY

ABC's 2009 retelling of *V* didn't mark the first time one of the Kenneth Johnson's projects received the reboot treatment. Two years before *V* returned to the airwaves, NBC launched a remake of *The Bionic Woman* (1976-78), which had originally starred Lindsay Wagner as a tennis player who is transformed into a cyborg after suffering a horrific skydiving accident. Originally conceived as a spinoff to *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1973-78), Johnson's modern-day myth was inspired by the Greek and Roman mythology he had read as a student at Carnegie Mellon University. He depicted his eponymous protagonist as a "real human being" who suddenly found herself endowed with superhuman powers but struggled to use them properly and integrate in "normal" American society.

Feminist viewers embraced and applauded Wagner's strong and realistic portrayal as the show's superheroine Jaime Sommers. "I never even thought about . . . trying to get Jaime into a swimsuit . . . except for *Bionic Beauty*, where she was in a 'Miss America'-style pageant," Johnson recalled in an interview. "I was never targeting a specific demographic . . . just trying to tell good stories. Although—and this is unique in the annals of sci-fi—all my shows from *Bionic Woman* through to *The Incredible Hulk* and *V* to *Alien Nation* drew as many females as males. The largest audience segment for all my shows was actually adult women. I think that's because of my focus on character and emotional relationships" (Den of Geek Interview).

The new *Bionic Woman* starred Michelle Ryan as Jaime Sommers, a struggling bartender who receives cybernetic implants after becoming seriously injured in a car accident. The surgically implanted nanomachines give the bartender superhuman powers, and she is recruited by a shadowy organization to use these newfound talents (such as martial arts) to combat crime.

When David Eick rebooted *The Bionic Woman* in 2007, he hoped to duplicate the success of *Battlestar Galactica*, which he co-created with Ronald Moore for the Sci-Fi Channel in 2004. However, critics and audiences felt differently. Alessandra Stanley of the *New York Times* derided the reboot for its appeal to the lowest common denominator. “NBC has remade *The Bionic Woman* almost as a rebuke to the original 1970s show” the critic wrote in her scathing critique in 2007. “NBC’s show, which is more about fembot martial arts and slick ‘Matrix’-ish special effects than about character development, is oriented toward young male viewers” (Stanley). *The Bionic Woman* reboot received the ax in November 2007—just two months after its disastrous debut. Johnson was not surprised by the hasty cancellation. “We always wanted to do stories that were *about* something,” he told Chris Mann in 2012. “Forget about plot. What is the story about? Is it about passion? Is it about greed? Is it about lust? I think that that thematic approach is what’s missing in a lot of shows that come and go and are quickly forgotten. When I first heard that David Eick was involved with *The Bionic Woman* reboot, I thought it could work because he made the new *Battlestar Galactica* much more interesting than the old one, but when I saw the pilot, I realized they had totally missed the humanity, humor and heart of the show” (Mann). *The Bionic Woman* reboot committed the same infractions the *V* remake would make two years later by neglecting the grounded character-driven elements and sociopolitical themes in Johnson’s original work and emphasizing special effects, science fiction clichés, and stylized action sequence reminiscent of *The Matrix* (1999). As with the *V* reboot, audiences didn’t find relevancy with *Bionic Woman*’s flat characters and trite story, as evinced by the show’s prompt cancellation.

As Johnson indicated, one of the most common threads that binds his projects together is the presence of a central theme or main idea that unites the characters and connects them with

the viewer. In the case of *V*, this theme is systematic oppression and how normal, everyday people react to it. In some instances, the Visitor occupation exposed humanity's ugly side as opportunists and collaborators exploited this power and took advantage of their position at the expense of their fellow human beings; in other instances, people fought against this injustice and formed a resistance movement. The themes depicted in Johnson's work take precedence over the science fiction tropes and action sequences; as we have seen, had the network not interfered, *V* would never have been a science fiction piece to begin with but rather an adaptation of Lewis's novel. Johnson revised the classic book as an alien invasion miniseries, allowing him to reach a broader post-Star Wars television audience. Unfortunately, the subsequent incarnations of *V* committed the same transgressions that Johnson endeavored to avoid. *V: The Final Battle* eschewed the social allegory espoused in Johnson's *V* in favor of action-adventure, and the weekly series that followed in 1984 showcased the melodrama prevalent in the primetime soap operas that dominated the airwaves at the time. Although the 2009 reboot initially began as a political allegory of America's war on terror, the quality underwent a precipitous decline as the show's second season became plagued by cartoony plot devices, inconsistent writing, and sensationalized melodrama. Johnson's proclivity for classic literature and the arts helped buttress the quality of his writing, especially his penchant for timeless themes that resonate with viewers. For example, while researching *V*, Johnson studied the writings of Bertolt Brecht and modeled the Visitor propaganda on the films of Leni Reifenstahl. "I reread Brecht's *The Private Life of the Master Race* and also studied classic works of non-fiction like Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* plus many first-hand accounts of the resistance," he wrote in an essay. "I looked again at films like Leni Reifenstahl's classic, brilliant, terrifying *Triumph of The Will* and Alain

Resnais' blood-chilling *Night and Fog*. All of them contributed ideas, visuals, characters and tonal concepts to *V* (On the Shoulders of Giants).

Johnson's *Incredible Hulk* weekly series didn't focus on the comic book villain of the week or saving the world as much as it did the loneliness and isolation of the show's central protagonist, David Banner, as he suffers to overcome his innate rage. Johnson approached the Hulk as a metaphor of some of humanity's darkest vices. "The best *Hulk* episodes were likewise built around the central theme: the Demon Within," Johnson wrote. "In Banner's case it was anger. But each week we strove to examine how the Hulk/Demon manifested itself differently: one character's 'Hulk' might be driven by alcohol, another by drugs, and another by jealousy, greed or avarice" (On the Shoulders of Giants).

Johnson implemented the same thematic approach to *Short Circuit 2* (1988), the follow-up to the 1986 comedy-science fiction film about a government-engineered robot that gains sentience following a freak accident. Penned by the writing team of Brent Maddock and S.S. Wilson (*Tremors*), *Short Circuit 2* follows the fish-out-of-water exploits of loveable robot Johnny Five (voiced by Tim Blaney) as he explores New York City in an effort to become more human and integrate with society. When he became involved with the project, Johnson felt Maddock and Wilson's script lacked a thematic element in which to connect with audiences. As he did with *V*, Johnson turned to classic literature for inspiration, this time from the prose of Victor Hugo:

When I was asked to direct *Short Circuit 2*, I pointed out that though the script was very funny, it would gain in depth and impact if we emphasized the thematic connection to *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The studio stared at me. Surely I'd lost my mind. But I explained that the robot, Johnny 5, represented a stereotype,

an exterior like Quasimodo or The Elephant Man which prevented people from seeing the pure soul burning within. We rewrote the script and people still laughed, but now they also cried. (On the Shoulders of Giants)

Following Johnson's revisions to the script, Johnny Five was no longer depicted as just a bumbling prop used for the sake comic relief but a living, sympathetic entity with a personality who suffers prejudice and discrimination while struggling to attain social equality. When a band of thugs viciously attack the robot in the film's climax, Johnny Five's mangled battery hemorrhages acid like an open wound. The severely damaged Johnny Five is eventually resuscitated like a human by his handler using a paramedic's defibrillator. After collaring the bandits who assailed him, Johnny Five is hailed as a hero and is ultimately granted U.S. citizenship by a judge. While still playful and jocular, Johnson's *Short Circuit 2* also deals with relevant themes about the qualities that define us as humans by showcasing the trials and tribulations of a sympathetic protagonist that overcomes overwhelming odds in the face of adversity to achieve social equality.

Johnson borrowed a similar theme when Fox asked him to helm the television adaptation of *Alien Nation* in 1989. Based on the 1988 science fiction film of the same name, *Alien Nation* is set in an alternate reality, where alien refugees and humans struggle to coexist in modern-day Los Angeles. The federal government eventually decrees that the aliens (referred to as "Newcomers") are eligible for the same rights, opportunities, and privileges as their human counterparts including the right to an education and the opportunity to obtain a high-paying job. The series' plot centers around a sardonic human police detective named Matthew Sykes (Gary Graham), who is assigned to an alien partner named "George" (Eric Pierpoint). In the beginning of their partnership, Sykes harbors a bitter distrust for the alien because his former human partner

had been brutally slain in the line of duty by a renegade Newcomer. The two sleuths from very different worlds are forced to set aside their cultural differences and work together to investigate various murders in LA. Each of them learns something more about their partner as the series builds, and the two detectives eventually become close friends. The weekly procedural series experiments with conventions from a variety of genres such as the buddy cop, detective fiction, and science fiction to convey a sociopolitical treatise about urban culture clashes.

Alien Nation's sociopolitical subtext was fertile ground for Johnson, who thrives on such material, but the Fox network had something else in mind when it approached him to adapt the 1988 film for television. "I took a similar, classically thematic approach with *Alien Nation*," he wrote. "When Fox asked me to look at the original feature and try turning it into a series, they envisioned it as *Lethal Weapon* with aliens. But the single scene in the movie that triggered my enthusiasm was a far simpler one – and much more profound: the alien cop waved to his family on their porch; his alien wife and their two little kids. In that moment I realized that I could do a space-age version of the classic movie, *In The Heat of The Night*. That would give me wonderful dramatic conflicts and humor and allow us to do a piece that is more than just a police procedural. It becomes a really deeply-felt piece about what it's like to be different. That's what we did, and that's why I think it was so successful as well" (On the Shoulders of Giants). Once again, Johnson turned to the classics when he developed the weekly series.

Just as *V* implemented science fiction conventions such as the alien invasion to convey its allegorical message, *Alien Nation* masks itself as a police procedural but is in reality a show about race relations. As Johnson explained in an essay detailing his take on science fiction:

These Newcomers were the world's newest minority. They faced prejudice and intolerance from nearly everybody. That was an ideal overall thematic foundation

which would run through the series and the subsequent movies. I had read many books that dealt with prejudice, from Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* to James Baldwin's *Another Country*. And I had lived it: I was born in the "classical" Deep South. I had been in bus stations with three restrooms: *Men. Women. Colored*. As a child I once saw a water fountain that said *Colored* and I turned on the faucet to see what color the water was. I was raised (though in Washington, D.C.) in a very bigoted, anti-Semitic household. For reasons that still confound me, I never bought into it. As I made more Jewish friends, I was startled to learn that many of them were prejudiced against gentiles. The beauty of *Alien Nation* was that we could face that theme openly and stir people of every race and religion to think.

(On the Shoulders of Giants)

Just as the alien invasion served as a metaphor for a fascist takeover of the United States in the original *V*, the presence of the Newcomers in *Alien Nation* functions as an allegory of the country's turbulent civil rights movement and cultural melting pot. Johnson borrowed elements from Scott's *Ivanhoe*, Baldwin's *Another Country*, and the detective formula of *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) to tautly weave an episodic tale that tackles controversial and complex issues such as prejudice, cultural assimilation, discrimination, and immigration without offending a specific demographic. Just as the beleaguered scientists in *V* represent persecuted Jews living under Nazi Germany, Johnson's Newcomers are metaphorical avatars of Hispanics, African Americans, homosexual or transgendered individuals, and any minority striving for social equality. Johnson's encyclopedic knowledge of classic literature and film gave him the tools he needed to construct his science fiction-police procedural.

At seventy-two, Kenneth Johnson is at a crossroads. After writing and directing the box office flop, *Steel*, in 1997, the semi-retired producer returned to his roots hoping to resuscitate the comatose *V* franchise. He planned to both reunite the original cast and introduce new characters in an ambitious sequel miniseries in 2006, but his efforts proved futile when network executives informed him they were more interested in remaking the original *V* than investing in a full-blown sequel. Instead of discarding his proposed screenplay, Johnson adapted his work into a novel which he published in 2008 under the title, *V: The Second Generation*, which he hoped would rekindle interest in the dormant series. However, a year after the 452-page tome was published by Tor Books, ABC launched its failed *V* reboot, propelling the franchise into limbo once again (see Chapter Two).

Johnson is currently campaigning to bring *V* back to life yet again in the form of a big-budget cinematic trilogy based on his original miniseries. In 2008, Johnson revealed that he had been involved with ongoing negotiations with various producers to get the project off the ground, but the announcement of the 2009 *V* reboot complicated his plans:

My producer friends David Foster and Ryan Heppe uncovered the fact that I owned and control the motion picture rights to “V.” I suddenly had a lot of suitors at the major studios and could have sold “V” a year ago. But having seen several iconic projects of mine redone disappointingly by others, without capturing the essence of what made them so popular and acclaimed, I want to make an arrangement that will allow me to best protect the quality and integrity of my original “V.” I would truly prefer that “V” never got remade rather than see it be made in less than the best way possible. We were in final negotiations with one studio to make the movie when [Warner Brothers] announced they had secured a

script development situation with ABC for a possible pilot. This has complicated our theatrical undertaking somewhat, but only made us more determined to make the movie of “V” that will exceed the expectations of the hundreds of millions of fans worldwide while stirring new audiences with the exciting adventure and the timeless, epic, human drama that has always been the heart and soul of *V*.

(Margulies)

According to a recent update on Johnson’s personal website, the veteran producer is still undeterred in his efforts to remake *V* as a cinematic feature, followed by two installments based on his novel *V: The Second Generation*. “We are undaunted and undiminished in our efforts to lock down the independent financing,” he wrote. “We have been very close many times only to discover that financiers had not been truly honest or fully viable—or that they were people we were not comfortable with” (Johnson).

When Johnson penned the original *V* in the early 1980s, he coyly used science fiction conventions to mask not only his sociopolitical allegory but classic literary influences as well. Nearly two weeks before *Return of the Jedi* would introduce the world to Jabba the Hutt and the Ewoks, audiences gathered around their television sets on the night of May 1, 1983, to watch what they thought would be a fast-paced sci-fi romp about reptilian aliens taking over Earth; instead they were seeing an updated version of Lewis’s *It Can’t Happen Here*. Audiences who flocked to the cinema in 1988 to watch *Short Circuit 2* were exposed to Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; and fans of the live-action *Incredible Hulk* learned the cautionary themes espoused in *Frankenstein* and experienced the lonely isolation of *Les Misérables* fugitive Jean Valjean through the weekly exploits of David Banner. Following his own exposure to classic literature in college, Johnson understood the importance of literature and sought to preserve its

legacy for a new generation by incorporating ingredients of it into science fiction projects such as *V*. Just as George Lucas was preserving the hero myth and religious symbolism in his *Star Wars* saga, Johnson used science fiction as a time capsule to house the works of vintage prose to be reintroduce to a contemporary audience. These universal themes helped *V* resonate with audiences for more than three decades while the vacuous 2009 remake followed the *Bionic Woman* reboot into obscurity. The *V* and *Bionic Woman* remakes lack the literary pedigree that Johnson instilled in his original works by introducing sterile characters and over-the-top stories to which audiences couldn't relate. The 1984 *V* sequel and subsequent weekly series are undermined by a similar flaw in that action and melodrama take precedence over substance. Had Johnson's original vision not been compromised, *V* may have enjoyed a protracted longevity. Although *V*'s future remains clouded with uncertainty, there can be no doubt about the show's cultural legacy. In a time where science fiction's contributions to television extended to clunky robots, cartoony violence, campy aliens, and wooden stock characters, *V* introduced a sense of depth to the genre unparalleled since Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* and paved the way for more serious and intellectually stimulating science fiction television fare such as *The X Files*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Lost*. On the surface, *V* is a typical creature feature about reptilians masquerading like humans, but like the Visitors themselves, appearances can be deceiving. When we venture beneath *V*'s superficial skin, we find a discourse on politics, power, loyalty, xenophobia, paranoia, prejudice, conformity, and what it means to be truly human.

WORKS CITED

- Abrams, Natalie. "V Switches Showrunner." *TV Guide*. 3 November 2009. Web. 12 December 2014.
- Abrams, Simon. "V: 'Laid Bare'." *A.V. Club*. 18 January 2011. Web. 11 November 2014.
- Baldwin, Kristen. "Entertainment Weekly 2007: Biography in Context." *Entertainment Weekly*. 2007. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.
- Bedell, Sally. "'V' Series an NBC Hit." *The New York Times*. 4 May 1983. Web. 5 November 2014.
- "Birth Pangs." *V*. Writ. Cathryn Humphris. Dir. David Barrett. Warner Brothers, 2011. DVD.
- Booker, M. Keith. *Science Fiction Television: A History*. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2004. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*. Web. 23 July 2013.
- "Breakout." *V: The Series*. Writ. David Braff. Dir. Ray Austin. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- Conley, Lawrence V. "V: For Vanished." *Starlog*. September 1992. *Archive.org*. Web. 12 December 2014.
- De Moraes, Lisa. "Executives Sound Coy about New Series's Political Edge." *The Washington Post*. August 2009. Web. 19 November 2014.
- "Devil in a Blue Dress." *V*. Writ. Hans Tobeason. Dir. Ralph Hemecker. Warner Brothers, 2011. DVD.
- "Dreadnought." *V: The Series*. Writ. Steven E. de Souza. Dir. Paul Krasny. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- Finney, Daniel. "'V' is No Victory for fans of '80s Sci-Fi Shows." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 27 July, 2004. Web. 15 November 2014.

- Garmon, Jay. "What Non-sci-fi Book Was the Original Basis for the Alien Invasion Series V?" Jay Garmon [dot] Net. 1 Dec. 2009. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.
- Gavin, Glenn. "V Aims at Obamamania." *Chicago Tribune*. 3 November 2009. Web. 19 July 2013.
- Gorman, Bill. "2010-11 Season Broadcast Primetime Show Viewership Averages." *TV by the Numbers*. 1 June 2011. Web. 11 November 2014.
- Gray, Jonathan. *Television Entertainment*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Green, Earl. "Introduction." *The Logbook*. 2009. Web. Earl Green. 24 November 2014.
- Hinman, Michael. "'V' Remains Creation of Kenneth Johnson." *Airlock Alpha*. 2 September 2009. Web. 11 November 2014.
- Johnson, Kenneth. "On the Shoulders of Giants." *Kenneth Johnson Official Website*, 2004. Web. 4 November 2014.
- . "Re: V." Message to Dan Copp. 20 July 2013. E-mail.
- . "The Truth of Science Fiction." *Kenneth Johnson Official Website*, 2004. Web. 4 November 2014.
- . V. Revised Second Draft. 1 September 1982. *V Out of Print Archives*. 3 September 2014.
- , and A.C. Crispin. *V: The Original Miniseries*. New York: Tor Books, LLC, 2008. Print.
- . *V: The Second Generation*. New York: Tor Books, LLC, 2008. Print.
- Koistinen, Aino-Kaisa. "Passing For Human in Science Fiction: Comparing the TV Series *Battlestar Galactica* and *V*." *NORA: Nordic Journal Of Women's Studies* 19.4 (2011): 249-263. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 29 July 2013.
- Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. New York: New American Library, 2005. Print.
- "Laid Bare." *V*. Writ. Gwendolyn M. Parker. Dir. David Barrett. Warner Brothers, 2009. DVD.

- “Liberation Day.” *V: The Series*. Writ. Paul Monash. Dir. Paul Krasny. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- MacDonald, James. “British Open ‘V’ Nerve War; Churchill Spurs Resistance.” *The New York Times*. Web. 15 November 2014.
- Mann, Chris. (Producers). 22 March 2012. *Reimagine That!* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from 17 January 2015.
- Margulies, Lee. “‘V’ Creator Kenneth Johnson Talks About a Return to Reptiles.” *Hero Complex*, 2008. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.
- McCoy, Sarah. “V: Lizard Aliens as a Social Reminder.” *The Millions*. 13 May 2010. Web. 11 November 2014.
- McNamara, Mary. “V on ABC.” *The Los Angeles Times*. 3 November 2009. Web. 18 December 2014.
- Meyer, Michael. “Introduction.” Introduction. *It Can’t Happen Here*. New York: New American Library, 2005. Print.
- “Mother’s Day.” *V*. Writ. Scott Rosenbaum and Gregg Hurwitz. Dir. Bryan Spicer. Warner Brothers, 2011. DVD.
- Newport, Frank. “Romney Has Support Among Lowest Income Voters.” Gallup.com. 18 September 2012. Web. 15 January 2015.
- Ocasio, Anthony. “V Season 2 Finale Review & Discussion.” Screen Rant. March 2011. Web. 13 January 2015.
- Owen, Rob. “Tuned In Journal: ‘V’ Creator Speaks.” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. 3 February 2008. Web. 12 December 2014.
- “Pilot.” *V*. Dir. Yves Simoneau. Wrt. Scott Peters. ABC. 3 November 2009. DVD.

- Poniewozik, James. "Another Visit for V." Time.com. 4 January 2011. Web. 12 December 2014.
- Porter, Lynnette. *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters: Science Fiction in Shades of Gray on 21st Century Television*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010.
- Prial, Frank. "'V' Victory for NBC." *The New York Times*. 12 May 1984. Web. 3 November 2014.
- "Reflections in Terror." *V: The Series*. Writ. Chris Manheim. Dir. Kevin Hooks. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- "The Rescue." *V: The Series*. Writ. Garner Simmons. Dir. Kevin Hooks. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- Schneider, Michael. "Original 'V' Voice Revisits Familiar Turf." *Variety*. 8 Feb. 2009. Web. 13 November 2014.
- Shelton, Gwendolyn. "Kenneth Culver (Kenny) Johnson." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2011. Web. 4 November 2014.
- Sides, John and Gross, Kimberly. "Stereotypes of Muslims and Support for the War on Terror," *Journal of Politics*, 2013. Web. 14 January 2015.
- Simpson, M.J. "Kenneth Johnson." www.MJSimpson.co.uk, 1997. Web. 21 July 2013.
- Stanley, Alessandra. "New Series: Women Test Mettle, and Metal." *New York Times*. 26 September 2007. Online. 17 January 2015.
- Sunday, Nick Joy. "Interview: Kenneth Johnson." *Starburst*. 8 May 2011. Web. November 20 2014.
- Terrace, Vincent. *Encyclopedia of Television: 1974-1984*. New York: New York Zoetrope, 1985. Print.

“The Monsters are Due on Maple Street.” *The Twilight Zone*. Writ. Rod Serling. Dir. Ronald Winston. Image Entertainment, 2013. DVD.

“The Champion.” *V: The Series*. Writ. Paul F. Edwards. Dir. Cliff Bole. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.

“The Den of Geek Interview: Kenneth Johnson.” Interview. *Den of Geek*. Jennifer Bartner Indeck, 30 July 2008. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

“The Return.” *V: The Series*. Writ. David Braff and Colley Cibber. Dir. John Florea. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.

Thomas, Scott. “Revisiting the Visitors.” *V Out of Print Archives*. 28 April 2011. Web. 12 November 2014.

Turbervill, Huw. “V is for Vanquished: Revived Sci-fi Show is Zapped.” *The Daily Telegraph*. 20 May 2011. Web. 19 July 2013.

“Unholy Alliance.” *V*. Writ. Rockne S. O’Bannon. Dir. Dean White. Warner Brothers, 2011. DVD.

Urbanski, Heather. *The Science Fiction Reboot: Canon, Innovation and Fandom in Refashioned Franchises*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2013. Print.

V: The Final Battle. Dir. Richard T. Heffron. Writ. Craig Buck, Diane Frolov, Peggy Goldman, Kenneth Johnson, and Brian Taggert. NBC. 6-8 May 1984. DVD.

V: The Original Miniseries. Dir. Kenneth Johnson. 1983. DVD. Warner Home Video, July 3, 2001.

Wiegand, David. “‘V’ Review: No Irony, Ecstasy in Alien Encounters.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. 4 January 2011. Web. 11 December 2014.

Yerkes, Andrew Corey. "A Biology of Dictatorships': Liberalism and Modern Realism in Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*." *Studies in the Novel* 3 (2010): 287. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 20 Oct. 2014.