Written by Max Weinstein
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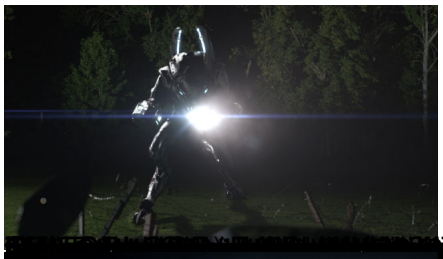
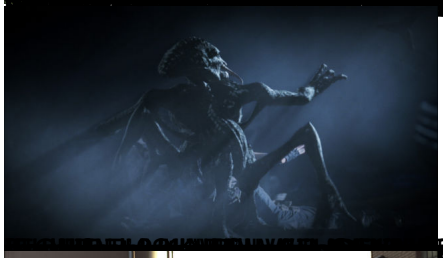
Nominating the unknown “other” in our universe as its entry point, Spielbergian science fiction continues to explore the vessels of fatherhood, unlikely heroes and human nature from a multiplicity of angles. Roy Neary’s discovery of life outside Earth renders him an obsessive, disconnected from his wife and children as he plays with his mashed potatoes in CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND. In WAR OF THE WORLDS, divorced, absentee dad Ray Ferrier flails to keep his son and daughter afloat, gunning his van down the highway in the throes of hostile invasion. Beginning June 19, alongside Steven Spielberg, co-executive producer and writer Mark Verheiden expands this familiar notion in TNT’s new series FALLING SKIES. As he tells Fango, the journey starts after the smoke clears.

Verheiden—whose early work at Dark Horse comics rendered the likes of Aliens, Predators and Ash into full-bore extensions of their respective franchises—was approached by Spielberg, SAVING PRIVATE RYAN scripter Robert Rodat and TNT’s Michael Wright with alien invasion on their minds, some three years ago before SKIES came to fruition. “Robert wrote the pilot, they made [it] two years ago. Things take a while to happen in television,” says Verheiden, who also wrote TIME COP, MY NAME IS BRUCE and has THE DARK TOWER movies/series up next. “[Then] last spring, in 2010, they were staffing up to make the rest of the series, another nine hours. Graham Yost, who does the show JUSTIFIED, was there at that point, but he was going back to JUSTIFIED, so he needed somebody to come in and take it over when he left. I was shown the pilot, my jaw promptly hit the floor, and I said, ‘Where do I sign?’ ”