

Timelash: Stopping the Clock

By Matthew R. White



One of the fondest memories I had as a child is remembering the first time I saw the UFO episode *Timelash*. I know, this episode featured my favorite UFO character, and she was wearing a very attractive outfit, but, all of this aside, the story focused on a subject that has always fascinated me: Time travel. *Timelash* was written by Terrence Feely who also wrote *The Man Who Came Back*. It was directed by Cyril Frankel.

The opening scene, when Ed tears through the control room trashing everything in sight, set the hook for the rest of the story. From that moment on I was glued to the TV screen. The acting, directing, and interplay have been discussed in other essays so I won't delve into it

too much here. The subject I want to discuss is the temporal manipulation aspect and how it affected the timeline.

I'll start with a quick synopsis of the important points. As Straker reacts to the medication administered by Doctor Jackson, we cut back to him and Colonel Lake returning to HQ from the airport. Diving right into the action, Straker and Lake spot an alien spacecraft. Ed tries in vain to contact HQ but is unable to raise them. After Virginia verifies that the radio link is operational the two of them continue driving towards HQ. Straker speculates that the base might already have been destroyed. It's about ten minutes before eight in the evening.

The UFO turns and attacks the car that the pair is driving and Ed and Virginia narrowly escape with their lives. They pull back onto the road only to be confronted by the alien spacecraft again. This time, instead of attacking, the alien

craft emits an energy field. What this field does is not clear at this point. The UFO leaves the area and Ed gets back on the road. When our two heroes arrive at HQ, they don't find a destroyed base. Instead they pull into broad daylight. As they take in their surroundings the shock begins to take hold. Ed's analytical ability really shines as he quickly realizes that this event has just happened. When they compared watches to the man on the hovercraft, it only reinforced what they both knew; the unspoken communications between them here was fantastic. Down in control they put their heads together to try and figure out what they can do to counteract the effect. It's then that they realize that the effect is getting to them. In medical center as Ed prepares the injection he puts forth a viable theory and Virginia follows him by thinking along the same lines. In my opinion Straker's analogue of the pressure wave in front of an aircraft as well as Lake's idea of a

time barrier, really queued the audience in to what was going on.

Armed and medicated Straker and Lake confront Turner who, in a gross miscalculation, gives them new insight into the nature of the effect. By telling them that the aliens are coming Turner verified what Straker and Lake have already surmised. Both Turner and the aliens grossly underestimated Straker's resourcefulness, and they pay a toll for it later. Ed and Ginny find out that Turner also has the ability to move back and forth through time at will and that seems to make it impossible to pin him down. One of the most powerful moments in the episode was when Ed selflessly takes another shot of X-50 fully aware of the danger involved. His strength of character is immortalized by his comment to Ginny, "I made my choice a long time ago."

When they spot the UFO approaching Turner becomes a secondary concern. Ed has surmised that the aliens will destroy the base if they are allowed to land. One thing that struck me as being strange is Lake not being aware of the hidden elevator or the Molly. Judging by Ed's comment I can only conclude that he was the only one aware of its existence. By the time they were on the roof, Virginia had begun to succumb to the effects of the time freeze and she was having trouble remaining focused. I don't think Turner would have gotten the drop on her otherwise.

In one of the wildest segments of the entire series, Turner leads Straker on merry chase through to studio. Some of it could have been viewed as almost comical with his maniacal laugh all the while taunting Ed. In the end, it's Turner who defeats himself by grossly underestimating Straker's intelligence giving him a vital piece of information. Ed grabs the

stolen key from the now dead traitor and makes it back to the roof just in time to damage the UFO, forcing a retreat. In a rare moment of tenderness he looks at his fallen friend and comrade, gently touching her hair. He shows great strength of character again when he leaves Virginia on the roof in favor of finding the device that Turner had modified to create the time field. Duty first, friendship second is Straker's mantra.

I think the writer intended us to assume that the energy field emitted by the UFO that attacked Straker and Lake is the event that initiated the *Timelash* effect, but with further analysis, the conclusion does not seem to fit. We know that it was just after 18:00 at HQ and still daylight when the continuum was tampered with. So I have to assume that the signal sent by the UFO was meant to do something else. An invasion signal maybe? It's not really clear.

When Straker and Lake arrived at the studio I believe that they passed into a static bubble in the space-time continuum, which was created by the aliens using the equipment that Turner had modified. The onscreen evidence indicates a two hour discrepancy shown by the timepieces worn by Straker and Lake as compared to the clocks at HQ. This event created two timelines, one where the base was neutralized by the alien forces, and a second where Virginia and Ed prevent the UFO from landing. After further examination it's unlikely that the base itself was destroyed as the device causing the time freeze had to still be operational, although the aliens may have simply killed the people there. We find out later from Turner that this is not really a time freeze, but the expansion of one microsecond of time. That is an important point to make as it would explain why electricity and light still flowed normally. We have to remember that the speed of light is a constant. The device was apparently also what allowed

Turner, in his words, to “play time like a trumpet now.” The field effectively altered the rules of temporal mechanics. Straker had correctly assumed that the alien craft was approaching much faster than normal and in doing so it generated temporal waves that fed the time freeze device. It is important to note that when Straker destroyed the alien device, time moved forward from six in the evening as it was still daylight when Paul and the studio security forces chased after Ed. So the story had both a temporal manipulation as well as a time travel aspect.

The multiple timeline aspect would seem to support the many worlds theory of quantum mechanics. The UFO that attacked Straker and Lake at around 19:50 was disabled by Straker at just after 18:00. This would have created a paradox as the craft would not have been able to attack Straker’s car at 19:50 like it did the first time. With the many worlds view, a timeline

exists where the aliens did disable the base and did continue with the plan that they were executing. Had Straker tried to leave the area of the time freeze after they damaged the UFO he would have entered a new timeline where the UFO wasn't there. He would have never been able to get back to the timeline that he was originally in as it would no longer be a possibility. I think the many world view best fits the events depicted in the episode.

This episode had some of the best action scenes in the series as well as a complex and thought provoking plot. I'm sure there are other interpretations as to how the timeline was affected and it is sure to be a lively discussion. But for me, it is the temporal aspects in this episode that make it my very favorite.