

CINEFANTASTIQUE

February 1995

\$5.50
CAN \$7.30
UK £3.75

STAR TREK VII



CLIVE BARKER
CANDYMAN 2
HELLRAISER IV

WILLIAM GIBSON'S JOHNNY MNEMONIC

Volume 26 Number 2



X-FILES

TV series creator Chris Carter on his homage to Kolchak.

By Dale Kutzera

UFO's, alien beings, mutant bugs, reincarnation, extra sensory perceptions—it must be an X-File. Few programs have generated the kind of word-of-mouth that has surrounded Fox's hit paranormal mystery series. In a single season, *THE X-FILES* has been compared to such classic series as *TWILIGHT ZONE* and *OUTER LIMITS*. Executive producer Chris Carter, although a fan of those series, had something more recent in mind when he created the show.

"I was a big fan of *THE NIGHT STALKER*. I thought it was great," said Carter of the classic horror series of the mid-seventies that starred Darren McGavin as the irascible monster-hunter. "I watched it as a teenager and it's something no one has ever tried to do again. So I came up with what I felt was a show in the vein of the *NIGHT STALKER*, but without the built-in problems—which was we couldn't do the monster-of-the-week or vampire-of-the-week. I'm not a big horror film buff, nor am I a sci-fi buff for that matter. What appealed to me is that I could tell good, smart stories, rooted in a speculative science which is something I am interested in."

The result is a unique combination of horror and science fiction. Each week FBI agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) are called in to solve an apparently impossible crime, each involving some paranormal phenomenon. For example, a man is brutally killed in a high-rise office but there is no sign of the murderer's entry or exit. The answer? A genetic mutant who emerges from hibernation every 30 years to kill and can stretch his body to slip through ventilation ducts; A group of loggers vanish without a trace. The answer? A swarm of bugs, mutated by volcanic radioactivity, attack at night, trapping their victims in a web-like cocoon; Re-



Mulder discovers the government's alien facility. Genuine creepiness inspired by *KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER* but minus the comic relief.

search scientists are being killed one by one and the most likely suspect is a retarded janitor. Answer? The janitor is being controlled by the psyche of his brilliant twin brother's cryogenically frozen head. The bizarre plots are only the tip of the iceberg. *X-FILES* at it's best is about mood, tension, and a genuinely creepy sense of the macabre.

Carter admitted, "It's a very difficult show to write for. I'm not finding a lot of people out there who can write it. There's no bible [for the show]. The other writers and producers—who have been such a huge part of *X-FILES* success—just know instinctually what would make a good X-File and what wouldn't. You can't ever go too far, but you've got to go farther than just far enough. It's a fine line, certain things qualify and certain things don't. It's a combination of several different genres—horror, mystery, thriller, suspense—you'll see some of the comedy influence in the main character's rapport—so a little of everything goes into it. It's very hard to qualify, but once you hook into something, everything has X-File potential."

No matter how far-fetched the storyline, Carter and his staff somehow manage to anchor part of it in the realm of scientific plausibility. A killer who is apparently growing younger, and possesses a regenerated arm, is revealed to be the result of research into the aging disease Progeria and the use of salamander cells. A crime suspect who possesses super-human strength and bleeds green, toxic blood, is the result of experiments using alien tissues for gene therapy on humans.

"The way the four acts plot out, the story has to make big believable leaps forward on sometimes rather unbelievable terrain," said Carter. "What helps us do that is the different belief systems of the characters and we always add a good dose

of science. What's particularly satisfying to me is that the scientific community are big fans of the show, because it's not bogus science. We're rooting it in real science that we research ourselves through various contacts that we have.

"For example, on the season finale 'The Erlinmeyer Flask,' I actually sent the script to a friend of mine who is a research virologist at Amherst University and she went over it with a fine tooth comb and told me what was accurate and what wasn't. I was dealing with essentially an alien hybrid on that show so my science was very accurate and my departure was speculative."

Paranormal murders may seem to be an unusual career turn for Carter, who began in Hollywood as a writer at, of all places, Disney Studios. When Jeffrey Katzenberg read and liked Carter's second screenplay, he offered the young writer an office, secretary, and the job of writing Disney movies of the week. This led to work on situation comedies such as *THE NANNY* and *RAGS TO RICHES*.

"I can't make a logical case for why *THE X-FILES* now and not before?" said Carter.

"You want someone to give you a job for so long and as soon as they do, you do the job they give you. You don't get to pick and choose a whole lot in the beginning. The producer would come to my door and say 'Hey kid, you want to write a Disney Sunday movie?' and I'd say sure. Pretty soon I was seduced by the pace and demand for television. It appealed to me that I wasn't going to do something in the abstract—which in the film business is on paper. I wanted to see script-to-screen transfer and this gave me an opportunity to do that. What happens is people look to catalog you or pigeon-hole you and if you look at what I had done before and sort of measure THE X-FILES by that it wouldn't make sense, but this is really my strong suit...or at least one of them."

Now as executive producer of his own series, Carter finds himself accumulating frequent flyer miles commuting between the writing and post-production offices in Los Angeles and then filming locations in Vancouver B.C. The exchange rate between the U.S. and Canadian dollar makes Vancouver an cost-effective place to film, and the surrounding locations provide a variety of landscapes to stand in for various U.S. locations Mulder and Scully are sent to each week.

One of the most memorable episodes, however, took place almost entirely within one set, a remote arctic research station. In "Ice" a team of scientists drilling core samples in the Arctic mysteriously kill one another. The culprit is an alien microbe that becomes a worm-like parasite in the host's brain, and like John Carpenter's THE THING, we're not sure who is infected and who isn't.

"What's nice about a show like 'Ice' is you get to build a set and you shoot inside and everybody can stay warm and cozy," said Carter. "You don't have to drive all over hill and dale to shoot the show. You've got eight days to shoot a show and no matter what you do it costs a lot of money. The trick is to write a good script that plays the bottle quality and finds movement and interest inside that story."

One thing you won't see on X-FILES is a great amount of blood. Carter struggles with network censors every week over what he can and cannot show on screen. "What you don't see is always scarier than what



David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson as FBI agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully.

“What appealed to me is that I could tell good, smart stories, rooted in a speculative science which is something I am interested in.”

—Producer Chris Carter—

you do see. Blood is not scary. It's an element of what scares you, but in itself it's not scary. People's reactions to things are what is scary. We try to play their reactions. We try to do a lot of our gore and anything that could be construed as violence off screen.

"We have a very constructive relationship with standards and practices at Fox, but that's not to say we don't get down and fight it out over certain things we want to do. In an episode called 'Young at Heart' there was a strangulation by a guy with a salamander hand and we couldn't keep it on screen for so long because they felt it was going over the edge, so we had to cut it back. But we can't do things as simple as showing someone getting a needle poked in

their arm. Certain things are verboten and we have to follow those rules and guidelines. You can't show someone getting a shot, but you can show them being hit with a twelve gauge shotgun, although we don't do that on this show. I'm against gratuitous violence on television, but violence itself is an element of drama you need it in order to tell a story."

THE X-FILES enjoyed solid ratings from its debut in the fall of '93, but the "buzz" surrounding the series didn't take hold until mid-season. X-FILES has also since gained a loyal following of critics and fans (who have adopted the moniker X-Philes) and the whole-hearted promotional support of Fox.

Carter also counts the FBI as an unofficial fan of the show. Last summer he visited their headquarters with Duchovny and Anderson, who were cornered by several agents seeking autographs. "It was great, a kind of dream come true for me," said Carter. "When I originally researched the show they were helpful to a point,

but then chose not to be helpful past that point and so it was sweet to be invited by them to see this place we had only imagined. I'm directing episode number five this season and there is something in that episode which I took right from a moment we had at the FBI where a guy was showing us a computerized ballistics cataloguing program which has just been implemented."

This season, Carter will also go high-tech as the Delphi on-line service will offer fans the chance to communicate directly with X-FILES producers in a series of on-line forums. Participants will have to agree not to pitch story ideas.

Although the series has tapped into a vein of public curiosity with the paranormal, Carter remains a skeptic. "It's hard for me to say. I'm a natural skeptic and tend to doubt things until someone removes my doubt. So I write from the Scully point of view in that sense. But like a lot of people, I want to have a religious experience. I want to see something that makes me believe, that bowls me over and that is what Mulder is looking for. So I am a combination of both things. I didn't believe in UFO's. I don't know how I feel about it now. Too many otherwise sane, incredible people have told me their experiences and I have very little reason to doubt them." □