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D. Voigt

X-FILES

When a show works best as self-parody, it's time to shut off the transporter beam.

By Thomas Doherty

After seven seasons, the murky excursion into alien abductions, '60s-era assassinations, and labyrinthine bureaucracies known as THE X-FILES is facing its gravest threat: the male half of the delusional duo of Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) has been scooped up and placed in suspended animation by beings from the remote star system of Tea Leoni. Can Mulder be rescued from the netherworld of celebrity matrimony and beamed back to his lonely-guy apartment and platonic partnership? Can Scully transfer her doe-eyed devotion to another passive-aggressive love god?

But first, some backstory. In 1963—note the year—the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote a famous essay entitled “*The Paranoid Style in American Politics*,” the thesis of which was that a nearly pathological dread of unseen forces and secret cabals has been a recurrent theme throughout American history. From the Salem Witch Trials, to the anti-immigrant Know-Nothings of the 19th century, and forward to the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, Americans have blamed aliens in their midst for the troubles in their psyche.

Never latent for long in



The “Millennium” buss, a partnership in the comfortable groove of a modern two-career marriage—mutually supportive, professionally rewarding and utterly sexless.

American culture, the paranoid style returned with a vengeance in the 1990s. The symbolic touchstones were two motion pictures from the fevered brow of director Oliver Stone, JFK (1991) and NIXON (1995). In the Stoned universe, the yin and yang of 1960s politics and presidential personalities collapsed into the same black hole of mad hatter hallucinations (“Through the looking glass, people!”). Stone promulgated what the *New York Times* sardonically dubbed the Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory, a concoction of all the *au courant* targets of fixation lurking in the cobwebs of suspicions minds. CIA, KGB, FBI, NRA, IBM, LCN, RJR—

pick the nefarious initials, toss them in the air, and the alphabet soup that turns up can only mean one thing.

Cultural-historically speaking—and not coincidentally—the buyer’s market in conspiracy theory that exploded in the 1990s paralleled the proliferation of a quite visible “unseen force” burrowing into American homes and office space. No, not cable television—the computer, the channeling device for the all-too-symbolically named Worldwide Web. Cyberspace, not outer space, is the real impulse behind the show’s paranoid style. Computer codes, computer screens, and computer nerds spread like an e-mail

virus through the plotting and *mise en scene* of THE X-FILES.

Chris Carter’s genius was to adapt the paranoid style to the 60-minute deadlines of a weekly series. Basically, THE X-FILES is The FBI Story with Cancer Man in the J. Edgar Hoover role: a police procedural that provides conventional closure each hour but that remains open-ended in the long run. Just as the FBI will always have crime, Scully and Mulder will always have conspiracy. To really solve the puzzle behind the Grand Scheme or expose the pattern under the paranormality would be to implode the world according to THE X-FILES—

where it is always 12:30 on the grassy knoll and mangled ET’s lie on slabs in a secret military base, where shadowy figures, lit by beams of flashlight, haunt the chilly twilight of a British Columbia forest, and where Cancer Man, a kind of FOREST GUMP of great locations in conspiracy history (Roswell, Dealy Plaza, Area 51), blows smoke rings, literally and figuratively, in the face of sanity.

Fortunately, the wiggled-out philosophy underpinning the show has always been less important than the charismatic lead players, a man and a woman with dual loyalties and divergent agenda. At once agents of the state and double



Season-ender "Requiem," less a cliffhanger than preview of coming attractions, leaves Scully fertile with an immaculate conception and Mulder lost in space.

agents, Scully and Mulder used their FBI badges to subvert the bureaucracy they served. Cunningly, Carter pulled a neat reversal on gendered expectations: Scully, the attractive redhead, was the scientific rationalist. Mulder, the button-down male, was the intuitive, quirky believer, a guy who glimpsed the paranormal in every burst of static electricity.

Year after year, as the pair rifled through ever more baroque folders in the X-FILES, the real dramatic tension had nothing to do with the loopy melange of left wing and right wing gibberish too convoluted to keep straight without a flow chart. From the pilot episode onwards, the most eagerly anticipated probing involved Mulder and Scully, not a lab-coated alien and a backwoods hick. During tender moments in the morgue, sublimat-

ed passions radiated from Mulder while Scully, scalpel in hand, dug out an organ chronicled in no medical textbook. Yet sometime during the last season or so, the moment passed for an extended heterosexual link-up between Scully and Mulder. The partnership settled into the comfortable groove of a modern two career marriage—mutually supportive, professionally rewarding, and utterly sexless. When Mulder invites Scully over for popcorn and a video of PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (he watches the porn alone), they're like brother and sister.

Not surprisingly, then, the much-hyped seventh season finale was less a cliffhanger than a preview of coming attractions. Finally, Mulder has himself been abducted. Over the years, he must have felt so rejected as his sister, his partner, and every

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

"No longer going for the big chill, Carter and company are winking at their audience, a sign it is time to put away the metallic anal probes and send this ship off to orbit in syndication."

inept cop in rural America was selected for an extraterrestrial joy ride while he, the true believer, was left with nothing but ashes and slime to send back to the FBI lab for analysis. Not to be outdone, the once-barren Scully has become the fertile vessel for an immaculate conception. "I'm pregnant," she declared in the sign off line to the last episode. (Who—or what?—is the father? And did he smoke a cigarette afterward?) Ever since the infamous tattoo-to-her backside episode, the feminization and sexualization of Scully has been a narrative twist waiting to play out as a trump card. Having finally admitted that she has seen too much to play the skeptic, Scully has evolved into a more vulnerable and emotionally dependent woman...Next season, one suspects, she will be recast as the true believer and her new partner—a plant? can he be trusted?—will be the skeptic as they search for a freeze-dried or post-traumatically stressed Mulder.

"The truth is out there," read the t-shirts and "I want to believe," pleads the poster in Mulder's office. Both slogans hint at another truth behind THE X-FILES. More terrifying than the notion of "a conspiracy

so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man" (as no less a conspiracy buff than Senator Joseph McCarthy once put it) is the thought that the whole shebang is a mundane event or a random accident—that the UFO really is a weather balloon or a lone gunman with a lousy Italian-made rifle can change the course of American history with a single bullet.

Perhaps this is why the most entertaining episodes lately have been the self parodies, where killer cockroaches scurry and living dead roam, or where (in the Duchovny written and directed episode) Scully and Mulder are played by Tea Leoni and Garry Shandling in a motion picture only slightly more ludicrous than a 1998 motion picture called THE X-FILES. No longer going for the big chill, Carter and company are winking at their audience, as if to say: even we can't pretend to believe in this muddled mish-mash anymore. But only a member of a vast CFQ conspiracy would have the audacity to suggest that when a show works best as self-parody, it is time to shut off the transporter beam, put away the metallic anal probes, and send the ship out to orbit in syndication. □

Scully and Mulder, played by Garry Shandling and Tea Leoni in "Hollywood A.D.," filming a movie only slightly more ludicrous than 1998's THE X-FILES.



THE X-FILES SEASON SEVEN EPISODE GUIDE

By Paula Vitaris

"In the source of every illness lies its cure."
—Scully

SIXTH EXTINCTION ★1/2

11/7/99. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise Innes.

Picks up from last season's finale, "Biogenesis," with Scully still in the Ivory Coast, examining the spaceship she found buried in the sand at the beach, and hoping it contains clues to curing Mulder, who is back in Washington, falling ever more ill from a mysterious brain disorder. Scully finds that the ship is covered with writing and symbols in ancient (human) languages containing both religions inscriptions from different faiths as well as complex scientific information, such as a map of the complete human genome. The ship also has mysterious powers, bringing on Biblical plagues and miracles (the sea boils and turns to blood, locusts appear, the dead are brought back to life).

In Washington, Mulder manages to tell Skinner to find Kritschgau (John Finn). Once Kritschgau gets a look at Mulder, he claims he is experiencing the same symptoms of people who he'd seen in an experiment on remote viewing. He gives Mulder a drug that brings him out of his coma and demonstrates with a computer test that Mulder now has amazing pre-cognitive abilities.

This season-opener seems to be marking time more than anything else. Scully lingers in Africa, learning what we've already been told in "The Beginning," "The End" and THE X-FILES movie: humans may be of alien origin. The ship's ability to bring on Biblical plagues and raise the dead results in a gratuitous zombie-kills-Dr. Barnes scene. Scully doesn't even try to explain this scientifically, but then, why should she? She's slowly coming around to believing in aliens—until the next non-mythology episode, where she conveniently will be a skeptic again—and apparently the aliens need no scientific explanation, they are beyond our ken, sort of like God. The spaceship mysteriously disappears at the end of the episode, smacking dreadfully of plot device, as does Scully's vision of the old African man telling her some truths are not meant for her. One would hope that such a pronouncement would bring out the bulldog in Scully, but, no—it's back to the U.S. for the good doctor. In other words, since the writers can't think of a better way to get her to pack up, a vision will have to provide the motivation.

Mulder's situation is handled just as poorly.

CSM and Mimi Rogers as Diana Fowley experiment on Mulder in "Amor Fati," carrying the Christian symbolism to ridiculous lengths.



Skinner tends stricken Mulder in season opener "Sixth Extinction," suffering from a mysterious brain disorder that gives him precognition.

The spaceship rubbing has activated previously dormant areas of his brain, straining his body but giving him extrasensory and pre-cognitive powers. To what purpose is this affliction/brain enhancement of Mulder's? Now he's the X-File, says Kritschgau. Since Kritschgau proclaims he still doesn't believe in aliens, it's hard to tell what he means by that, since the episode seems to posit that Mulder's illness and consequent powers are of alien origin. But we've already seen all of this in episodes past with the missing-in-action Gibson Praise, whose genetic pattern matched alien DNA and whose abnormally high brain activity gave him superpowerful ESP. Mulder became ill for one reason: to provide a sixth season finale cliffhanger. With all his family and professional problems, there are many reasons why Mulder might suffer a breakdown, but the writers have studiously avoided creating a truly organic source for such an occurrence. Mulder's illness is purely plot-driven and not particularly interesting, or even suspenseful. We know he'll come out of this just fine and be the same old Mulder again.

Diana Fowley shows up again, to confess to Mulder what he already knows, since he can read minds: she loves him. *Ah ha!* We knew it all along. She is this show's most soap-operatic creation so far. Diana Fowley, torn between handsome, sensitive and honorable Fox Mulder, and the creepy Cigarette Smoking Man, who offers her access and power. Who will win her heart? Tune in next week. And we will, since "The Sixth Extinction" is the second of a three-part arc.

"I'm dying, you idiot. If I could get up, I'd kick your ass."
—Mulder to the Cigarette Smoking Man

AMOR FATI ★★

11/14/99. Written by David Duchovny & Chris Carter. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Scully's back in D.C., hovering over Mulder, until his mother checks him out of the hospital, although a videotape reveals the involvement of the Cigarette Smoking Man. Sure enough, the CSM has spirited Mulder away and, in a bizarre operation, has himself injected with "genetic material" from Mulder's brain, presumably so he'll be immune from the impending alien viral invasion. Thanks to an injection from the CSM, Mulder is experiencing a massive hallucination; he believes he is living a "typical" life: wife (in the person of Diana Fowley), kids, suburban house, Deep Throat and CSM as benevolent neighbors. He grows old, never noticing the alien apocalypse outside the window, until Scully (who in real life has been slipped a card key leading to Mulder's whereabouts and has come to rescue him) rouses him from his stupor to fight the invaders. Within Mulder's dream is another dream: he sees a little boy on a beach building a spaceship (much like the one Scully examined in the Ivory Coast) in the sand. At the end, he joins the boy in the ship's construction.

We've seen this before on THE X-FILES—

one partner lies comatose while the other runs around trying to find the cure, with occasional bedside visits. This time it's Mulder's turn to escape into a dreamlife, courtesy of a drug provided by the Cigarette Smoking Man. Mulder's dream is a deliberate rip-off of Martin Scorsese's THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (adapted from the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis), with Mulder as Christ. Even worse, the episode clumsily drags the artificial linkage between Mulder and Christ into the real world, with a shot of an unconscious Mulder restrained on a cross-shape table in the CSM's medical lab, a metal "crown of thorns" encircling his head. Apparently, comparing Scully to the Virgin Mary in "Emily" wasn't enough; now it's Mulder's turn to be Jesus. The comparison is simply preposterous—nothing about Mulder's journey resembles that of Christ's, and Mulder isn't remotely Christ-like.

Mulder's dream-within-a-dream works much better: simple, spare, taking place on a beautiful beach with the peaceful ocean waves rolling in and out. The determined little boy building his spaceship of sand is a touching reminder to Mulder of a more innocent time and also of the willpower that has kept him going all these years.

Diana Fowley's role in "Amor Fati" proves once more that the writers have no idea what to do with her. She and Scully finally come together for what one would think would be a tremendous confrontation, but all they do is glare at each other, anti-climactically. And when Diana finally has a change of heart and betrays the CSM to save Mulder, her internal struggle takes place off-screen—as does her murder. Scully mentions her death to Mulder almost as an afterthought. What an insult to a character who has been poorly written to begin with, but nevertheless had a major part in recent mythology episodes.

With Diana Fowley dispatched with callous disregard, Scully and Mulder have one of the series' most on-the-nose and maudlin scenes ever: telling each other they're each other's touchstones. At least we are left with the beautiful image of Mulder and the little boy building the spaceship of sand; it may be washed away some day by the waves, disappearing like the Ivory Coast ship, but it's the effort to make it that counts.



Fried brains anyone?—mutant Rob Roberts' view of the product sizzling at Lucky Boy Burgers, a nicely satiric touch by scripter Vince Gilligan.

"I'm sorry, but this is like good cop, insane cop."
—Rob Roberts to Mulder and Scully

HUNGRY ★★

11/21/99. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

"Squeeze" casts a long shadow. Six years after that seminal X-FILES episode, the monster (or mutant) of the week storyline has become one of the show's most familiar. It's also fallen into formula, serving up "Hungry" as a case in point. This time, the mutant is a young man named Rob Roberts (Chad E. Donella, FINAL

X-FILES

CHRIS CARTER

The man behind the mytharc on filming 7th season.

By Dan Persons

Where's the profit in knowing that the sinister and the strange daily walk our streets, when it seems that THE X-FILES—the show that poked at our paranoias, that visualized our national apprehensions, that defined cutting-edge horror for the better part of a decade—had finally reached the end of its own, recently tortured lifespan?

In the reality of television broadcasting, THE X-FILES had dodged the cancellation bullet one more time, finding itself renewed for an eighth season. In terms of the all holy mythos, though, fans had to wonder at what cost Chris Carter's brainchild had received its reprieve. Was this actually a new lease on life, or just a dwindling survival on life support, spurred by a network whose proprietors were all-too-aware of how they had botched the previous season? Could the creators and principals of the best genre show on television overcome internecine conflicts and hardening of the arteries to push this final season to heights not previously achieved, or would those tuning in be confronted with vague hints the show's prior glory?

Those were questions that avid viewers really wanted to know. You'd sooner get the correct time from the Cigarette Smoking Man.

Talking to Chris Carter, at the end of 1999 was a cordial, but cautious, experience. He could hardly be blamed—in what for him should have been a triumphant autumn, the executive producer had instead seen his carefully conceived worlds dismantled by strife and incompetence. The problems had actually started last summer, when X-FILES star David Duchovny filed suit against 20th Century-Fox, charging them with selling reruns of the show to the Fox-held FX network for much less than what the episodes would have brought in open syndication, thus cheating the actor out of his rightfully-earned share of the profits. While Carter was not named as a defendant—Duchovny is ballsy, not crazy—the executive producer was cited as



Creator and executive producer Chris Carter, tending to Fox's golden goose for a final eighth season next year.

an accomplice in the deal, willing to sell his profit-partners down the river in return for favorable treatment for his future shows.

If such was actually the case, then Carter should have checked the fine print a little more closely. On the decision of Fox Entertainment president Doug Herzog—a man who would be out the door scant months later—the network threw the bulk of its autumn '99 promotional might behind ACTION, a funny, edgy satire of current-day Hollywood that, it turned out, nobody on Earth wanted to watch. Forsaken in the push was HARSH REALM, Carter's new attempt to bring X-FILES-style darkness into the virtual reality world. The miscalculation was epic: by November, all of Fox's fall debuts had been cancelled, HARSH REALM included.

Carter did not mince words when asked if Fox had jumped the gun in cutting life-support on HARSH REALM: "Yes," was his terse reply. Asked about the emotional impact of the cancellation, he became more voluble: "There were a lot of people invested in it, a lot of my friends here, whom I

work with, a lot of people who had been giving a tremendous amount of attention and energy to it. For it to be so summarily and thoughtlessly cancelled really just hurt a lot of people. That is something you deal with in ways that no one but people on the inside would know."

If keeping some things within the production family was Carter's automatic response to tragedy, it was no surprise that he'd respond to questions about Duchovny's litigious revolt with similar caution: "I'm not going to talk about the lawsuit, because I've been asked not to. But along with the creative aspect of the job, there is a business aspect of the job. That was about business, and the business is about often-competing interests."

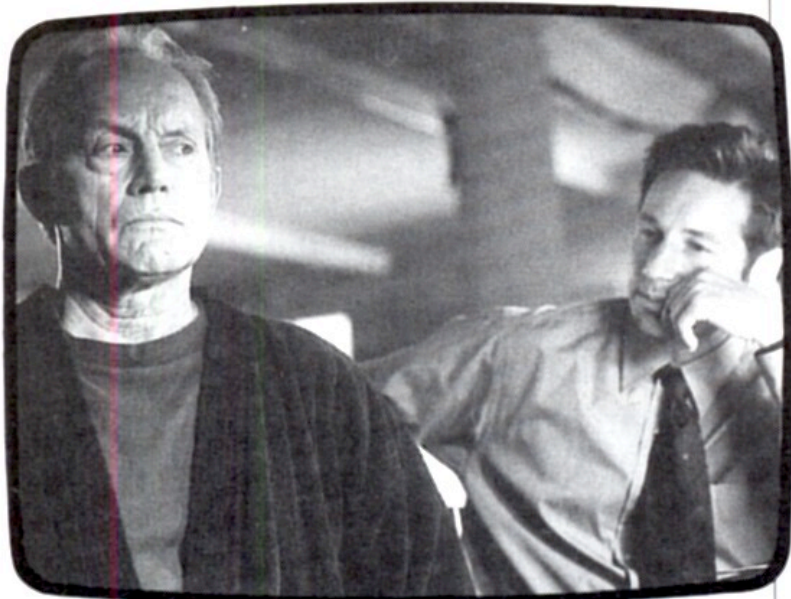
Was it easy, though, to set aside those interests when Carter had to face his recalcitrant star on the soundstage? "We have not had words, if that's what you mean."

Maybe not—whatever kind of diva Duchovny may turn out to be, no witnesses have stepped forward to claim that he ever brought his business problems to the set. Still, with "The Sixth Extinction," the season opener of THE X-FILES' seventh season, one had to wonder whether the actor wasn't paying some sort of on-screen price for his legal hubris. Picking up from "Biogenesis," the prior season's cliff-hanging final episode, "The Sixth Extinction," offered us a Mulder reduced to a comatose state, and maintained in that condition for the bulk of the hour. Looking close into Duchovny's glazed stare, one could imagine someone fairly high up the production ladder whispering in the actor's ear, "Is this the way you want to play out your final season?" The perplexities only doubled in the following week's "Amor Fati," a script credited to both Carter and Duchovny. In a scenario that recapitulated the finale of Martin Scorsese's THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST, we got a Mulder wishing for any path other than the one his life had taken, and an operating table crucifixion, complete with high-tech crown of thorns, that heaped on intimations of the agent's divine status, at least by his own

DESTINATION, in a strong performance), who disguises his true appearance (needle teeth, black animalistic eyes, hairless and earless head, dead-white skin) with wig, makeup, contacts and prosthetic teeth and ears. He wants to live a normal life, but the best of disguises can't eliminate an overwhelming urge to eat people's brains, which he sucks out of their skulls with a long, slender proboscis he keeps hidden in his mouth. Because David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson were finishing up work from summer projects when "Hungry" was filmed, Mulder and Scully appear infrequently. Mostly we see Mulder showing up, Columbo-like, to dig into Rob with supposedly innocent questions.

"Hungry" suffers from a syndrome that has afflicted a great many X-FILES episodes in recent seasons, but even more so here, because of Duchovny and Anderson's unavailability. This syndrome consists of the audience finding out early on who the guilty party is, what his (or her) problem is, and how he (or she) goes about accomplishing his (or her) nefarious deeds. There is no mystery to what's happening, and Mulder and Scully do little besides finding out what the audience already knows.

The saving grace of "Hungry" is its satiric tone. While sympathetic to Rob's struggles, writer Gilligan and director Manners cast a rather acerbic eye on his milieu: the tacky fast food emporiums (notice that nasty-looking Lucky Boy Burger statue) and cheap apartment buildings of Southern California's less affluent areas. A hallucinatory shot from Rob's perspective of frying burgers shaped like brains is sick but hilarious. Psychologists, here in the form of one Dr. Reinhart (Judith Hoag), also come in for some digs. Dr. Reinhart is a sympathetic therapist assigned by the insurance company of Rob's employer, Lucky Boy Burgers, to help employees cope with the trauma of a murder at their workplace (a murder committed by Rob). She's sooooo sweet-natured and sincere and anxious to help that she is more caricature than believable human being. So it's not entirely unexpected when she shows up at Rob's apartment (a no-no for a mental health professional) because she's worried about him. But then, where would this episode end if she hadn't? Mulder enters just as Rob is about to turn the good doctor into lunch, and when Rob, overwhelmed by guilt and self-loathing deliberately refuses to back down, Mulder shoots him. It's a sad moment, but the overall derivativeness of the plot keeps it from being the tragedy it should have been.



Mulder meets former FBI agent Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) in "Millennium," a crossover more fitting for Carter's doomed show than here.

"Nobody likes a math geek, Scully." —Mulder

MILLENNIUM ★ 1/2

11/28/99. Written by Vince Gilligan & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

If you couldn't guess by the title,

perception, in shovel-fuls. Daring, dramatic experiment, or Duchovny's calculatedly overdramatized retort to his tormentors? Only the authors knew for sure.

Said "Amor Fati" director Michael Watkins about Duchovny's on-screen vision of martyrdom, "I think David is such a fine writer and such a free mind. Chris has obviously proven that, and David—who did [season six's baseball-flashback] 'The Unnatural' and this—is so free, he's so gifted. For him to write this, he was totally there with the character. That's what it took and it was even more enlightening to have the writer be there right at the moment, so that we could really talk about where we were going, and the passion of these moments and these themes... And for poor David, lying on that table with that headgear on, it was extremely uncomfortable—his poor butt was cooking on the lights and [in that] head thing, he couldn't move. It was sort of ironic, because he wrote himself into this awful position.

We had a lot of smiles, though. I really like David and Gillian. I like them a lot."

While the season opener did add more fuel to the mythos fire—suggesting that aliens were in possession of technologies that could do everything from cure cancer to explain Adam Sandler's career—it was not immediately clear in what direction the balance of the season would go. "I actually thought this was going to be the year of Scully's science," admitted Carter. "That in doing that, there would be many spiritual concerns. Scully's dilemma is: how do you reconcile faith in God and faith in science? That's always an interesting question for the writers. I think we're dealing with that on some levels; we're actually telling six mythology episodes this season—in those we are dealing not just with Scully's faith, but with Mulder's faith as well. It has become somewhat spiritual, but I think what's more interesting is that we set out to do one thing and then found ourselves being more interested in something else."

Something else was right, although sometimes "anything else" might have been a more accurate description. The problem

“Last season, we didn't intend to make it lighter, it just wound up that way. A lot of people missed the old-time scary ones so we tried to make them scarier.”

—Co-Exec. Prod. Vince Gilligan—



Revisiting old friends: Scully gets reacquainted with Nick Chinlund as Donnie Pfaster in 7th season's "Orison."

scary ones, so we probably tried a little harder this season to make them scarier. Which is not to say we don't have the occasional lighter one, like 'The Amazing Maleeni.' But I think as a whole that we're not really heading it in any specific direction, other than to say we need to find out pretty soon whether or not this is our last season, and that will inform quite a bit."

Deprived of a clear-cut objective, THE X-FILES was free to try new directions in story-telling, but also evidenced one of the most telling signs of a show that had outlived its concept: creeping redundancy. "Chimera," about murder in a mini-Peyton Place, recapitulated the ambiance of last season's Mulder-goes-suburban "Arcadia," but without that episode's subversive tang.

The witty "The Amazing Maleeni," about a couple of conniving illusionists, not only failed to shake its ties to the classic "Humbug," but in an overall plot structure that had Mulder and Scully slowly becoming cognizant of their participation in a mechanism greater than could be immediately perceived, also seemed an earth-bound reworking of December's more su-

was, with one star pretty much admitting his full-bore animosity towards the show and his co-star not far behind in her contempt, with the executive producer potentially resenting being held in orbit around his only, bona-fide hit when, by all rights (and possibly without the network bungling), he should have already achieved escape velocity with newer, more challenging projects, no one seemed confident enough in THE X-FILES future to declare a clear-cut path for the season.

About the only thing that could be noted this year was a definitive move away from the more humorous tone the show had taken after its sixth season move to California, a season that hard-core fans derisively, and possibly unfairly, had dubbed, "X-FILES Lite." Observed co-executive producer Vince Gilligan, "Last season, we didn't have any conscious intention to make it lighter, it just sort of wound up that way. I think we heard a lot of people saying that they missed the old-time



Gillian Anderson turned auteur for "all things," writing and directing with a heavy hand that exhibited little talent and even less understanding of her role as Scully, with Nicholas Surovy.

pernatural "The Goldberg Variations."

Meanwhile, the strain marks continued to show, with at least seven of the episodes constructed to keep the bantering agents apart (and one, the killer tobacco "Brand X," even contriving to put Mulder into a coma again), and enough episodes set at least in part in California (including, curiously, Vince Gilligan, John Shibam and Frank Spotnitz's effective Appalachian-revenge thriller, "Theef") to make one wonder whether last season's production move wasn't finally taking its toll. Both stars have clearly taken more active control in the show's production, both to their benefit (Duchovny's self-scripted and directed "Hollywood A.D.") and their detriment (ibid. "Amor Fati," and Anderson's disastrous "all things," a self-conscious outing in which Scully, hitherto a devout Catholic, suddenly and inexplicably turns Buddhist). Whatever modifications—star-inflicted or otherwise—have occurred to THE X-FILES characters (and what the hell happened to Mulder's fondness for skin rags, anyway?), Carter claimed that such changes could only be expected over the span of seven years. "I think Mulder is still a willing participant in any adventure that cannot be explained; he still takes the unpopular side; he still puts it in the face of his superiors. If anything, though, he has worked with a partner who has seen so much that he's not able to get as big a rise out of her as he once did. I think he may seem to be less of the 'Spooky Mulder' that she came to know early on. But the aspect of Mulder's character is still the same in that he wants to believe he is looking for phenomena that cannot be explained and that might expand his perception of reality."

As for Scully's ability to remain the skeptic after having been exposed to weekly helpings of aliens, poltergeists, and giant mutated fluke-men, Carter said, "Scully's a scientist, so she comes to everything scientifically. Even though she sees something that she can't explain, she thinks it can ultimately be explained. That's her M.O. and her bias. So while she has seen a lot, she is never going to take anything at face value and say, 'That is paranormal.' She will always look for a rational and scientific explanation."

The season was far from a total wash. Gilligan was responsible for two engaging envelope-pushers—the monster P.O.V. experiment "Hungry" and the reality-TV satire "X-Cops"—and the darkly vivid Monster-of-the-Week "Theef." The mythos two-parter "Sein Und Zeit" and "Closure" took the questionable tactic of trying to explain the JonBenet Ramsey killing in supernatural terms, but also provided an emotionally engaging conclusion to Mulder's search for his sister Samantha (while, in fine X-FILES tradition, raising three new questions for every one that it answered). And the cleverly titled, William B. Davis scripted "En Ami" dared to give us a glimpse at the Cigarette Smoking Man's humanity, while still keeping his motivations shrouded in clouds of Marlboro smoke. Admitted Carter, "This show is so elastic that it succeeds on so many levels. I think that there is no one episode that is a crystallization of what the show does best, because it always is surprising, even to me, how many things it does well. The fact that we can actually make fun of ourselves and everyone seems to have fun doing it and fun watching it, I think, says a lot about the show, too. It is protean."

However mutable the series might have been, though, it could not accommodate all

"Millennium" is the inevitable X-FILES/MILLENNIUM crossover episode. The teaser is promising enough: a man hides out in a funeral home after the wake, opens the coffin, exchanges clothes with the corpse and then presses a switched-on cell phone into its hand. The mysterious man next shows up at the cemetery after the burial, his cell phone at the ready. Sure enough, it rings, and he heads out towards the grave, shovel in hand. The intrigue continues into the first act, when Mulder and Scully meet with Skinner and several other agents to discuss the grave robbery. It turns out that the deceased, a former FBI agent, was one of four retired FBI agents who had all shot themselves and then had their graves desecrated. All four had also joined a law enforcement consulting agency called The Millennium Group. Mulder seeks the help of Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) now in voluntary commitment at a psychiatric hospital. He is trying to get his life back together in order to regain custody of his daughter, Jordan (Brittany Tiplady). Desperate to avoid any action that would keep him from Jordan, Frank refuses to assist Mulder and Scully—but he also slips Mulder a clue that puts the two agents on the trail of the mysterious clothes-switching, grave-desecrating man.

Unfortunately, after this episode's initial scenes, everything slides downhill rapidly, with a storyline that crosses the border into ludicrous. Henriksen plays him with such indifference that it's hard to care about anything Black does. Frank and The Millennium Group aren't even necessary to the story; this episode could have been about any group of eschatologically-obsessed people—but this storyline really belongs on an episode of MILLENNIUM and not on THE X-FILES.



One of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? No, it's a shambling zombie straight out of George Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD.

According to the mystery man, who turns out to be a true believer in the coming Apocalypse named Mark Johnson (Holmes Osborne), the four former FBI agents felt the only way to bring on the dire events of the Millennium was to kill themselves, after which they would be brought back to life as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This is an odd notion, to be sure, but nonetheless, they do come back to life. But do we get four terrifying horsemen? No, we get zombies. That's right, shambling, homicidal zombies who have nothing better to do until the advent of the Apocalypse than bury themselves in the dirt floor of Johnson's basement (except when they're killing people). The only way to stop them is a bullet through the brain; has someone at Ten Thirteen been watching NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD?

To cap off an otherwise lackluster episode, Mulder and Scully finally do the wild thing—for these two, that's a kiss on the lips. The time is New Year's, Mulder and Scully are relieved they have escaped yet another near brush with death, and there's this sprig of mistletoe hanging above them...According to interviews with Chris Carter, a fan had written to complain about all the near

and false kisses on the show (and in the movie), and Carter decided the fan had a legitimate beef. Mulder says after the big moment, "The world didn't end." It didn't shake, rattle, or roll either. This kiss seems stuck on to the episode by a tack in its complete irrelevance to the storyline or Mulder and Scully in general. Carter seems to be saying, "There, you asked for it, you saw it, can we now forget it?" Still, in its complete absence of passion, that kiss sums up "Millennium" quite nicely.

"I'll show you my theory if you show me yours."

—Mulder to Scully

RUSH

★★

12/5/99. Written by David Amann. Directed by Robert Lieberman. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

A bland story about some bland teens who discover a cave that possesses a magical property that gives them the power to manipulate time: i.e., they can move so quickly that to others they seem to move not at all. Thus, when one teen wants to torment his teacher, he seemingly stands still while the teacher is slammed around the cafeteria. Think of *THE FLASH* mixed with the *STAR TREK* episode "Wink of an Eye." The twist here is that the teens must return periodically to the cave to renew their power, and that the time-shifting has an addictive, severely detrimental physiological effect: the power in the cave also acts like a drug, giving them the titular rush, while simultaneously wearing down their bodies. One boy in particular, Max (Scott Cooper), falls under the time-shift effect's thrall, to the point where he feels invincible and kills a police officer to keep his secret. The cause of death is so peculiar, however—among other things, a blow to the officer's face was so violent it literally pushed his glasses to the back of his head—that Mulder decides to investigate, with Scully in tow. Mulder's first guess—poltergeists—is off-base, but various pieces of evidence, including a surveillance tape analyzed by Mulder's scientist-of-all-trades pal Chuck Burks (Bill Dow), and hospital records and tests lead Mulder to the facts. The pressure of the investigation forces the arguing kids back once more to the cave, where a girl named Chastity (Nicki Aycox), who is also addicted to the power of speed (geddit?), shoots the out-of-control Max, and then, with her super-quick powers, commits suicide by stepping directly in the bullet as it exits Max. The special effect of Chastity stepping in front of the slow-motion bullet, is a neat one, although nowhere near as spectacular as similar shots in *THE MATRIX*; it's more on the level of the many TV commercials these days that use the same photographic tricks. Although "Rush" would like to be an insightful comment on teen angst, resentment of and the thrill of defying authority, as well as the thrill and degradation of addiction, it

Scully and Mulder investigate murders linked to perpetrators moving faster than the eye can see: think *FLASH* and *Trek's* "Wink of An Eye."



situations, especially when the decision to move ahead on an eighth season was delayed until the very end of season seven. "We're still waiting to hear," Gilligan said in January. "[20th Century-Fox Television and Fox Broadcasting topper] Sandy Grushow said that he thought it was a 50/50 chance at this point. I don't know what the exact odds are, but I do know for sure it is up in the air still and we are waiting for a final verdict from David Duchovny and Chris Carter.

"We need to find out pretty soon whether or not this is our last season, and that will inform quite a bit. If it is our last season, we just need to know so that we can end the show properly with a great two-part episode or a three-part[er] or something like that. If it's not our last season, I guess we're just...we don't really have...Chris Carter and [executive producer] Frank Spotnitz may have more of a master plan, but I think generally if this is not our last season we're all basically doing what we always do, which is trying to come up with a good mix of mostly scary and some suspenseful and some lighter episodes, and just keep entertaining our audience.

"You know, it's a shame: with the original *STAR TREK*, they didn't know they had been cancelled—I guess they had been cancelled during their hiatus, and they didn't get a chance to do a final episode, which I guess everybody would have appreciated. I don't think anyone's going to let that happen here. If *X-FILES* ends, I can't imagine it would be because we were cancelled. It would only be because David Duchovny and Chris Carter and Gillian Anderson decided it was time to move on to other things."

Of course, any vote that incorporated Duchovny's voice was easy to prognosticate. By April, the actor was talking openly with *Entertainment Weekly* about how his "Hollywood A.D." episode would be "my way of saying goodbye," and speculating on what his life would have been like if *THE X-FILES* had backed off the Mulder/Scully interplay and become more an ensemble show (Here's a hint: "Hi, I'm David Duchovny for 10-10-321..." Jeez, hasn't the man ever seen *THE*

“The show succeeds on many levels. There is no one episode that is a crystalization of what the show does best...It's surprising how many things it does well.”

—Exec. Prod. Chris Carter—



Krista Allen as Jade Blue Afterglow in "First Person Shooter," a *HARSH REALM* virtual reality leftover, helmed by Carter.

er than that, I don't really have a great answer for you."

Carter again minced no words when asked about his intentions to participate in the next *X-FILES* movie: "That's my plan." As for moving with the show into season eight, his public stance was initially one of guarded optimism: "I would only do it if I felt that everyone wanted to do it, because I felt that there were plenty of good stories to tell. If everyone felt that they were up to it, I would be excited to continue. I think that anything past year five is difficult for a series, but it's also where, if you can work in a collaborative and creative way, I think you can find things that you didn't know were there. I think we're at that place, we can continue to be. The other reason would be that there are very few, great television ideas, and something like *THE X-FILES* has the ability to generate so many different kinds of stories that you cannot close the door on it just because you can. The show becomes bigger than its parts. If there were more good stories to tell, I think, in a way, it's only doing justice to continue on."

But it seemed that, after making that

OTHERS?).

Taking no chances, Fox gave Chris Carter the go-ahead to spin *THE LONE GUNMEN*—the conspiracy theorists and cyber-geek poster-boys who were rarely seen this season—off into their own series, the pilot being hastily assembled and shot in early spring in Vancouver.

As far as what path an *X-FILES* eighth season might take, no one dared speculate. "It's a question we're always asking ourselves," admitted Gilligan, who has a contractual commitment with Fox for at least the next season, and who claimed he would be happy to continue on with the show.

"Everyone knows that [Scully and Mulder] have a tremendous respect for one another, certainly a platonic love for one another and they would each lay down their lives for the other. I think that's the way we like it, that's the way a lot of the fans like it as well. That could probably blossom into some sort of romantic relationship, but I think we're also reluctant to push it to that level. Other

doesn't really say anything we haven't seen in dozens of teen-oriented shows or even past X-FILES episodes, such as "Miracle Man," "D.P.O." or "Die Hand Die Verletzt," which all dealt with inter-generational conflict (among other things) and featured memorable actors playing young people with strong, specific personalities. Here our three teen characters, played by actors far too old to pass as teens, are as generic as can be, their individual situations are equally generic (Max's dad is, of course, the town sheriff, Tony's mom wants a better life for her son), and there is little the actors can do to bring these kids alive. "Rush" is hardly the worst of THE X-FILES; it's merely forgettable.

"So basically we're looking for Wile E. Coyote."

—Scully

THE GOLDBERG VARIATION ★★★

12/12/99. Written by Jeffrey Bell. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

A charmer of an episode, "The Goldberg Variation" introduces us to one Harry Weems (Willie Garson), an inconsequential little man who seems to be enjoying an extraordinarily consequential run of luck. He not only wins a huge pile of cash playing poker with mobsters, but he survives a push by the resentful gangsters off the roof of the building where the card game was held. The latter event comes to Mulder's attention thanks to a report from an FBI agent staking out the building. Mulder theorizes that Harry may have a genetic predisposition towards rapid tissue regeneration, but before long he decides Harry isn't a genetic mutant, merely the recipient of a lot of good luck.

The good luck premise is lifted bodily from a failed Fox series, *STRANGE LUCK*, but writer Bell and director Wright put their own delightfully quirky spin on it. It's such a pleasure to see an episode which features a good guy instead of a villain as the leading guest character. And Harry is very good; like Chaplin's Little Tramp in *CITY LIGHTS*, who devotes all his time to raising \$1,000 to pay for a cure for his beloved Flower Girl's blindness, Harry does everything he can to get the \$100,000 needed to pay for treatment of a neighbor boy's failing liver. What keeps Weems from falling into sentimentality is his irascibility, stubbornness and insistence on doing things his way. In 30 years, he could turn out to be another Arthur Dales (take your pick as to which one). Willie Garvin does a terrific job of making Harry irritating and loveable at the same time.

Mulder and Scully find in Henry's apartment, a wonderfully whimsical Rube Goldberg-like contraption from which the episode takes its central conceit: everything has a cause and effect. Henry's luck is the result of a series of events that are as Rube Goldberg-like in the way they play out as Henry's devices. The episode takes a number of unexpected paths and the last big

Nick Chinlund returns as Donnie Pfaster, the death fetishist of second season's "Irresistible," miraculously striding out of prison in "Orison."



Mulder in "The Goldberg Variation," framed by the legs of a thug hanging from a ceiling fan by his shoelace, a charming treatise on good luck.

surprise seems to be not coincidence, but fate working itself out to find a gratifying solution to everyone's problems.

"You need a buff and polish. I'll do it for free. I'll even do your cuticles."

—Donnie Pfaster

ORISON ★

1/9/00. Written by Chip Johannessen. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Yet another episode about religious faith and belief, weakly tied into the return of Donnie Pfaster (Nick Chinlund), the "death fetishist" of second season's "Irresistible." There must have been a big pile of leftover *MILLENNIUM* scripts. Pfaster escapes from prison, thanks to the unexpected and miraculous intervention of an ex-con preacher named Orison (Scott Wilson, *THE NINTH CONFIGURATION*). Orison hypnotizes, en masse, the entire population of inmates and guards of the state prison where Pfaster is incarcerated. When Pfaster realizes everyone is in a stupor, he takes advantage of the situation and makes his break. Orison's motivation is that Pfaster must be sprung so he, Orison, may personally render the death sentence Pfaster escaped. Mulder and Scully are then called in to track Pfaster down, and Scully must deal, in her usual repressed way, with the memories of her nearly fatal encounter with Pfaster in "Irresistible."

Everything concerning Pfaster in this episode is a retread of "Irresistible": he does his usual thing with prostitutes, fussing over one call girl's grooming and bathing habits, but this time his actions seem rote, rather than genuine expressions of an obsession. Director Rob Bowman does his best to instill an atmosphere of dread, but everything is so by the numbers that Pfaster's fetishes seem more amusing than scary. Pfaster even does the morphing-face thing again, this time into a demon, scaring the wits out of Orison. But suggesting Pfaster may literally have a demon in him serves to weaken the character further. Pfaster was so horrifying because he exemplified so purely the dark side of real human behavior. As for Orison, he definitely seems to have wandered in from a *MILLENNIUM* episode.

"Orison" wants to be another exploration of faith for Scully, who ends up in the grotesque, demeaning position, being bound and gagged by Pfaster. Scully escapes from her bonds and shoots Pfaster dead, a cold-blooded act of murder, not self-defense. Law enforcement officers break the laws they've sworn to uphold all the time; victims attack their abusers all the time. Even though there is virtually nothing in the episode to indicate that Scully is on the verge of losing her self-control, we are now given a situation where Scully, a federal agent who takes her duties with the greatest seriousness, has committed an act that she will find reprehensible on every level once she regains control of herself. It doesn't matter that Pfaster is total scum? She knows she killed him

when he was cornered and unresisting. So how is this tremendous aberration of character handled? The answer: it's not handled at all. Scully looks a bit sad afterwards and wonders to Mulder who was "in work in me, or what made me pull the trigger?" Mulder asks, "What if it were God?" and Scully counters, "What if it weren't?" You can make of this what you will, but the line is flimsy; it doesn't work as even the beginning of self-analysis; it's a weak tie-in to the religious aspects of the episode, and the idea that the devil may be working through Scully divests her of responsibility for what she did, just as a similar suggestion robs Pfaster of his true horror.

But evasion of responsibility seems to be the main idea at work at the end of "Orison." Mulder has told Scully he will write his report to say she didn't have any other choice but to shoot Pfaster; i.e., he's going to cover it up, and that means the FBI will cover it up, and no one will ever care that Scully murdered Pfaster, because everyone thinks he got what he deserved. Even if you buy the notion that Mulder and Scully are willing to participate in such a cover-up—a notion that a few seasons ago would have been impossible to contemplate—Scully, at least until this episode, was the kind of person who would be tormented by the fact that she killed a man no longer a threat to her. There are consequences to an act like this, and even if Mulder and Scully duck the professional consequences, the personal and emotional ones cannot be avoided, not if this show wants to maintain any relationship to reality and the character of Scully as she has been established over the years.

"Orison" might have been the beginning of an entire arc of episodes showing Mulder and Scully dealing with the death of Pfaster, which could then have branched off into an exploration of all sorts of issues concerning their work in the X-Files, but...no. It's back to the status quo and the reset button next week. The real x-file in "Orison" is why Ten Thirteen comes up with stories like this and then refuses to follow through on them.



Ricky Jay as cut-rate magician Herman Pinchbeck, faking his own death by decapitation to scam the FBI in "The Amazing Maleeni."

"God knows magic barely pays."

—The Amazing Maleeni

THE AMAZING MALEENI ★★

1/16/00. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

You can't help but think of what Darin Morgan would do with a storyline about magicians. Instead, we get a rather pedestrian hour whose credibility depends on how convincing you find the scheme concocted by cut-rate magician Herman Pinchbeck, a.k.a. The Amazing Maleeni (Ricky Jay), and his cohort in crime, Billy LaBonge (Jonathan Levit), to steal money from a bank via fraudulent electronic transfers. Supposedly, such a transfer requires the badge number of a federal agent, so Pinchbeck and



LaBonge dream up a crime they figure will attract the Feds, in the form of Mulder and Scully. Maleeni and LaBonge lead the two agents by their noses into a maze of deception and double-crosses, all so they can frame a small-time hood LaBonge hates, while also stealing the I.D. number off Mulder's badge and making off with the electronic cash.

This plotline is a bit like the recent film *ARLINGTON ROAD*, where radical right-wing conspirators put an extremely elaborate scheme into motion which they hope will dupe FBI agent Jeff Bridges into bringing a bomb into FBI headquarters. The scheme is fun to watch while it unfolds, but in the end, it's not credible; too much is left open to chance for it really to happen. "The Amazing Maleeni" has the same problem, along with one other: LaBonge tells Mulder and Scully that magic is about misdirection, so we're signaled early on that everything we see is a deception of some sort and we just sit back and wait for the next revelation. Plus, we see LaBonge framing the thuggish Cissy Alvarez (Robert LaSardo) as the perpetrator of a decoy robbery, so again we know that something's afoot. This is rather like a magician committing the ultimate no-no: revealing the technique behind his tricks. The ending is a let-down as well as unbelievable: why in the world would Pinchbeck need an FBI agent's ID number and thumbprint to make a transfer rather than the bank manager's password? Maleeni and LaBonge's daring scheme is built on a twist that does not pass muster.

The casting is impeccable. Ricky Jay, one of the best magicians around, is perfect as the dour Pinchbeck/Maleeni, deadpan enough to make even Buster Keaton happy. His few feats of magic are fun to watch. It's a pity that Maleeni's special trick—turning his head around 360 degrees—is achieved by a very obvious and cheesy computer effect. Jonathan Levit, who also demonstrates his skill with magic, is excellent as the wiseacre trickster LaBonge.

Unfortunately, the episode ends on a troubling note. Cissy has been framed as a bank robber. Mulder and Scully know he's innocent. Cissy is a lowlife criminal and he made LaBonge's life hell when they were in prison together, but he's innocent of the particular crime of which he's accused. Do Mulder and Scully end the episode talking about how to get him out of jail? No, they do not. That's a loose end that should have been tied up, if only with a line of dialogue.

"I'm just saying that somebody offering you all the answers can be a very powerful thing."

—Mulder

SIGNS AND WONDERS ★★

1/23/00. Written by Jeff Bell. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

Another script left over from *MILLENNIUM*?

Michael Childers as Reverend O'Connor, a fundamentalist who engages in snake handling as an act of faith in "Signs and Wonders."



Scully cowers before a caged snake in "Signs and Wonders," a script by Jeff Bell that plays like a leftover from the cancelled *MILLENNIUM*.

In Blessing, Tennessee, Mulder and Scully become embroiled in the conflict between a liberal minister, Reverend Samuel Mackey (Randy Oglesby) and a fundamentalist preacher, Enoch O'Connor (Michael Childers), who exhorts his flock to engage in snake-handling as a test of faith. When a mass of snakes kills the boyfriend of O'Connor's pregnant daughter Gracie (Tracy Middendorf), Mulder believes, according to the evidence at the crime scene, that there is more to the young man's death than meets the eye. His belief is reinforced when the snake attacks continue. He thinks the creatures are being directed to murder by some powerful and evil force.

Although "Signs and Wonders" purports to be an examination of different modes of faith, it offers a pessimistic—and distorted view of religion. The two churches are at the extremes of worship style. At one end is the fundamentalist church of joyful true believers, whose minister preaches that the only test of faith is putting oneself into mortal danger. Its rival is a church of liberal theology and good intentions, which is also stultifyingly dull and lacking in spirit. Of course, the latter church, whose members are complacent and doubt the Devil's literal existence, is the one where the Evil One sneaks in: Mackey actually is a demon with a snake in his throat (there's a Freudian image for you, and one that recurs on *X-FILES*, in episodes such as "Fire" and this season's "Hungry"). "Signs and Wonders" thus seems to be saying that the religious paranoia of an O'Connor is the only way to combat the devil. But there has to be a better solution than those offered by either of these churches, both of which come off, in their individual and very different ways, to be the last places anyone would want to worship; one's fanatical, the other is devoid of energy. "Signs and Wonders" offers no alternatives to either extreme. And Mulder and Scully, too, are powerless to stop Mackey, who escapes to take up a new post in another church at the episode's end. There is some fairly witty dialogue as Mulder and Scully debate the meaning of faith while they investigate the case, but it's all been heard so many times before. And their own individual tests of faith (both are subjected to snakes, Scully at O'Connor's church, and Mulder through Mackey's supernatural powers), go nowhere.

To its credit, "Signs and Wonders" tries to overturn stereotypes by showing that Mulder and Scully are wrong about O'Connor (they assume he is the father of his daughter's baby) and by making the "good" preacher the villain. But Randy Oglesby is so smarmy and self-satisfied as Mackey, that right away we know he is not to be trusted, and the episode thus undercuts its attempts to turn assumptions on their heads.

In fact, the episode's greatest fault is its cardboard characters, including the too-sincere Mackey. The liveliest performer—apart from Michael Childers, who gives an enthusiastic, committed performance as O'Connor—is the Minnie Pearl hairdo of Beth Grant as kindly Iris

Finster, one of Reverend Mackey's flock. There is also the matter of Gracie giving birth to snakes—a scene that is extremely disturbing, to say the least, especially with the special effect of snakes rippling under the skin of Gracie's pregnant stomach. Disturbing is good; it's been a while since there's been anything truly disturbing on this show.

"I don't know what is the truth and what isn't anymore."

—Mulder

SEIN UND ZEIT ★★

2/6/00. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

There are some powerful and touching moments in "Sein und Zeit," but others that miss the mark so widely that it hurts to think what this episode might have been. Mulder investigates the kidnapping of cute little Amber LaPierre, and of course Mulder (and everyone else) knows this is the kind of case Mulder takes personally. But when he begins to think Amber's case may be related to Samantha's abduction, the parallels between "Sein und Zeit" and "Paper Hearts" become all too obvious. But unlike the concentrated, intense "Paper Hearts," "Sein und Zeit" wanders over too much territory, as Mulder not only has to deal with the case at hand and his deep emotional responses to it, but to yet another tragic turn in his life, the suicide of his mother. The relationship between Mulder and his mother could easily have made for a two-parter all by itself, even without a suicide—let alone another child kidnapping.



Children turn up missing, with echoes of JonBenet Ramsey in "Sein und Zeit," revealed to be starlight children saved from suffering.

A major piece of evidence in Amber's case is a ransom note, which the police believe was written by Mrs. LaPierre (Shareen Mitchell) although she doesn't remember writing it and claims to have no knowledge of what happened to her daughter, a shameless exploitation of a real-life tragedy, the JonBenet Ramsey murder, which included a ransom note some believe written by Mrs. Ramsey. And if the ransom note weren't enough, later in the episode we meet the killer, a man who likes to dress as Santa Claus. No doubt he was based on Ramsey family friend who also liked to dress as Santa Claus. The LaPierre note leads Mulder to Kathy Lee Tencate (Kim Darby), a mother convicted of killing her son based on the evidence of a similar note. Kathy Lee tells Mulder that "walk-ins," whom she describes as beings who live in the starlight, took her son and Samantha to protect them from the harm they would have suffered in life. Despite the events of second season's "Red Museum," which also featured walk-ins, Mulder seems strangely unfamiliar with the term. This two-parter's use of "walk-ins" is equally confused. Kathy Lee also describes them as "old souls looking for new homes," but these walk-ins don't inhabit bodies,



"So who's going to be on the show next year?" the usual suspects seemingly debate in season-ender "Requiem." With Scully and Mulder side-lined, perhaps we'll be reduced to watching Skinner do paperwork.

statement, the exec producer took a more careful inventory of the stories remaining to be told and decided that justice had well been served. Come April, both Carter and Spotnitz had signed up with Miramax genre branch Dimension Films to respectively direct and produce/write *SERIOS*, a "true" story about a man able to project his thoughts onto

film negative. Why this change of heart? "I have a contract [with Fox] that lasts through the end of this year," Carter had said in 1999, prior to cutting the deal. "If I didn't re-up, I probably wouldn't be giving any attention to the show, but if I do re-up, I will be giving the same amount of attention to the show that I've always given to it, because I don't want it to be anything other than what it could potentially be." In light of ensuing events, it well appeared that Carter had made his own decision about his continuing involvement in the future of *THE X-FILES*.

As with all things *X-FILES*, Carter now faces a daunting puzzle: how to devote time and attention to a major, feature-film project while "giving the same amount of attention" to the show that placed his name on the media map.

Meanwhile, for the public's sake, it was all smiles from the series' principals as the show received the eighth season go-ahead. Duchovny, who just prior to the renewal was seen looking bored on the all-star edition of *WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE* (and who wound up taking home less money for his agonies than either Rosie O'Donnell or Ray Romano), told the press, "I am pleased we were able to come to an agree-

"I would only do [the show] if everyone wanted to, because there are plenty of good stories to tell. If everyone was up to it, I would be excited to continue."

—Exec. Prod. Chris Carter—

ment that enables me to remain part of *THE X-FILES*...I'm looking forward to going back to work." Getting a salary raise to a reported \$350,000-\$400,000, and having his suit settled out of court no doubt helped.

But one had to wonder exactly how much Duchovny relished a return to the world of the sinister and the weird when a part of his agree-

ment dictated a lighter workload in the upcoming season. The result of that handy codicil: No one should expect Mulder's prompt return from the alien-fueled joy-ride that scooped him up at the end of "Requiem," the seventh season closer.

With Mulder M.I.A. (probably to some beach in the south of France), Scully in a family way (having apparently been knocked up while doing the stop-motion Macarena in an Oregon forest—did Anderson ask for some off-time as well?), and the Cigarette Smoking Man apparently passed on (though you can never keep a good creep down), it's anybody's guess who will be fit enough to pick up the story come fall. Skinner? C'mon, do you really want to watch sixty minutes of paperwork? Krycek? An interesting alternative—his reformation is being hinted at, but *ibid.* the parenthetical for CSM.

The Lone Gunmen? Oops, sorry, they've got their own show to worry about. No, *THE X-FILES* world is now filled with people who, through either contractual or other obligations, are too preoccupied to carry on the work started seven years ago. It's an ironic counterpoint to the questions posed at the beginning: the truth may still be out there, but there may be no one left to discover it. □

they remove souls and transform the bodies into energy.

And one must wonder at the benevolence of supernatural beings who compel mothers to write notes that, in Kathy Lee's case, results in her conviction for murdering her son, and in Mrs. LaPierre's case, puts her under suspicion of kidnapping her daughter. Mulder becomes convinced both mothers are innocent—but at the same time, he must deal with his own mother, because Mrs. Mulder has committed suicide. An autopsy reveals Mrs. Mulder was suffering from cancer, but Mulder suddenly convinces himself that she must have written a note like Mrs. LaPierre and Mrs. Tencate and that when she called him earlier in the episode she was trying to warn him about Samantha being taken by the walk-ins, but she was murdered before she could do so. Convenient psychic clues provided by a vision of Amber to her parents lead Mulder and Scully to quickly catch the Santa Claus killer, but (as we will learn in "Closure") Amber is not one of his victims; her mystery is ended along with Samantha's in that episode. So the Santa Claus is really a herring in a red Santa suit.

There is a lot of good acting in "Sein und Zeit," primarily from Duchovny, who, no matter how many times he has to play Mulder's agony over Samantha, always hits the right note. The scenes where Mulder grieves over his mother—particularly when he lays his head on his answering machine to listen to his mother's voice on the tape—are truly affecting. He is matched by the superb Kim Darby (*TRUE GRIT*, the "Miri" episode of *STAR TREK*) as the plain, but luminous Kathy Lee Tencate, who despite her years in jail, is happy believing her son is in a better place. But to kill off Mulder's mother so suddenly smacks of plot device (and "Closure" proves it). Mrs. Mulder has always been a sketchily written character; the show never quite did her justice, and to kill her off so summarily is unfair both to her and to Mulder.

"I guess I just want it to be over."

—Mulder

CLOSURE

★ 1/2

2/13/00. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

"End of the road," says Mulder in "Closure." Translation: "Closure" is the end of Mulder's search for Samantha, unless Chris Carter decides he has to pull the Samantha-rabbit out of the hat one more time. But he probably won't; "Closure" has an air of finality about it. Sadly, instead of getting the grand, breath-taking, heart-breaking finale that should be the climax of Mulder's search for Samantha, the story expires limply with some nonsense about Samantha being one of the starlight children. It's as if Peter Pan had jumped through Mulder's window and announced that Sam had been in Never Never Land the whole

Mulder gets a hug from Samantha in "Closure," as if Peter Pan jumped through his window to say Sam had been in Never Never Land all along.



time. Only Duchovny's sincerity keeps the reunion scene from floating away altogether. Perhaps there's no way to provide a genuinely satisfactory end to the quest for Samantha; how could anything we see on screen top whatever has been in our imagination for seven years? Perhaps this is a story that shouldn't have an ending at all; certainly that would be preferable to the fuzziness that we get here.

In "Closure," a police psychic named Harold Piller (Anthony Heald) offers to help Mulder with the Amber LaPierre case. Piller admits he is also searching for his kidnapped son, and he knows Mulder is also in search of someone. Piller claims that Amber, Kathy Tencate's son and his son were all taken by "walk-ins"—beings of starlight who transform children into pure energy before terrible things can happen to them. Mulder's mother then appears as a ghost and Mulder, like Kathy Tencate and Mrs. LaPierre, unconsciously writes down a clue: "April Base," the name of a nearby deserted military base, where he learns Samantha had been raised with the Spender family, including Jeffrey Spender. They find Samantha's diary, which leads them to a nurse who had had contact with a runaway Samantha, and at the nurse's home the ghost of Piller's little boy leads Mulder to Samantha herself, now one of the starlight beings, at play in a lovely field with other children rescued by the walk-ins.

Thus, Mulder's reunion with Samantha comes not through any real detective work or a climactic confrontation with the CSM, but through a lot of coincidence and psychic clues, the worst of the latter being the clue communicated to him in writing through the ghost of his mother. Poor Mrs. Mulder; we see now that her suicide was merely the most cynical of plot devices; she's dead so she can pass a clue to Mulder. Of course, this clue is nothing like the other psychic writing clues—i.e., the long notes the starlight beings had the mothers of the two about-to-be-kidnapped children write, with the strange line about "Nobody shoots at Santa Claus." Presumably Mrs. Mulder is a run-of-the-mill ghost, not a walk-in; and she is far more succinct, passing along just two words. Of course, Santa Claus has been caught already; most of "Sein und Zeit" appears irrelevant to the events of "Closure," apart from Mrs. Mulder's suicide, serving only to introduce the idea of the walk-ins.

More psychic information is provided by Piller's little son, now one of the starlight beings. Piller doesn't see him, just Mulder, which one can interpret to mean that Mulder is now at an emotional place where he is ready to find Samantha and end his quest, whereas Harold is not. However, since there was absolutely nothing in previous episodes (including "Sein und Zeit") leading up to this enormous emotional transformation of Mulder's (this is the kind of story that calls for a season-long arc!), it's far too much to swallow that Mulder is suddenly ready, simply because he read Samantha's diary back at April Base, for this unquestioning acceptance of



The ghost of Mulder's mother (Rebecca Toolan) whispers in his ear in "Closure," at last solving the mystery of his abducted sister Samantha.

what is, after all, a dream or a vision. In fact, visions have become the easy substitute for crafting genuine character development this season.

Harold Piller is one of those Mulder-doppelganger characters who pop up from time to time on X-FILES, and Anthony Heald gives an excellent portrayal of Piller's desperation and panic as he searches for his lost son. We see in the pathetic Harold the possibility of a future Mulder, if Mulder does not get his own life together. But Mulder apparently does get his life together at the end, telling Scully he's at peace, one of the most astonishing things he's ever said. How can he possibly be at peace, knowing now the true horror of what Samantha endured from ages 8 to 14? And then there's his miserable family life after Samantha's disappearance, the murder of his father, the very recent suicide of his mother, everything else he and Scully have endured, the continued existence of the CSM and his henchmen, and, oh yes, the impending alien viral invasion.

And, of course, the end of his quest, which had fueled his very existence for so many years. This is a Mulder who should be entering a deep, dark depression as he faces a life without the motor that has driven it for so long. But no, Mulder will be his old self in the next episode and through the rest of the season. It's as if he never found Samantha.

"Closure" represents the triumph of irrationalism over rationalism in THE X-FILES. The Mulder who told Scully in the pilot episode that he wanted proof too has disappeared. The classic X-FILES dialogue of faith versus reason shrank to microscopic proportions a long time ago, but occasionally it would reappear, since a pro-forma scientific doubt from Scully could be used as "dramatic conflict." No need for that any longer. Mulder has had his vision and Scully will have hers.

Somehow David Duchovny forms a sterling performance. He's so moving as Mulder—in the diary scene, reading Samantha's tortured words, or looking up at the stars at the end—that one can only imagine what he he could have given us if the story had been truly worthy of his talents.

"We've got a report of a monster lurking around the neighborhood."
—Deputy Keith Wetzel

X-COPS ★

2/20/00. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

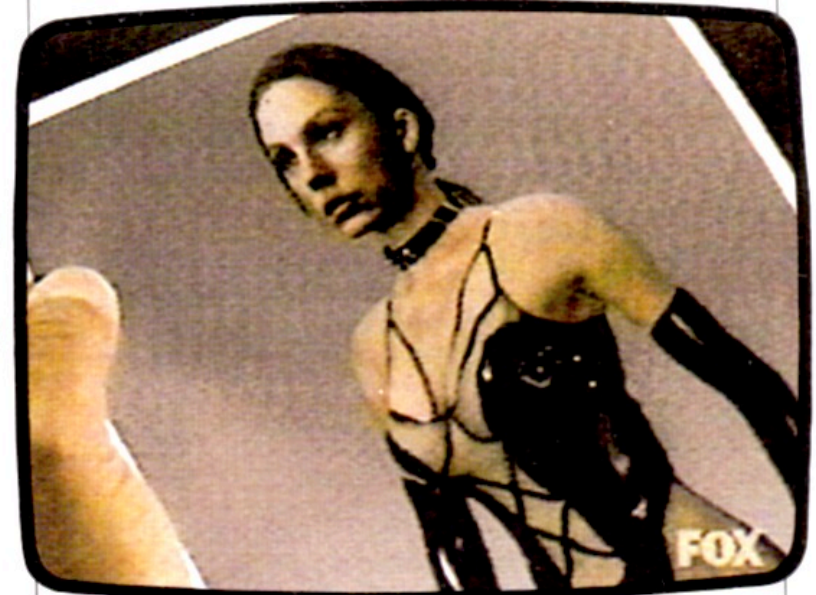
Who ya gonna call when there's a monster lurking in the neighborhood? The Los Angeles cops, of course, but as Deputy Keith Wetzel (Judson Mills) and his brothers and sisters in blue discover, Mulder and Scully are already on the case. So are a COPS camera crew, which has been assigned to record Wetzel as he makes his rounds that night. They capture some pretty peculiar footage, as well as a spectacular roll-over from

inside Wetzel's patrol car.

A crossover between THE X-FILES and COPS sounds like a dicey proposition, but "X-Cops," THE X-FILES' 150th episode, turns out to be one of the season's better hours. The various characters—Wetzel, his fellow officers, the respectable and not-so-respectable denizens of the working-class neighborhood they patrol—seem like people you see any given night on COPS. However, something you usually don't see on COPS is also out there, attacking and killing people, and everyone gives a different description of the attacker. Mulder, who at first thinks a werewolf is on the loose, soon comes up with another idea: he believes the creature is a fear monster which adapts itself to look like the thing its victim is most afraid of. So Wetzel sees a giant wasp man, an Hispanic woman sees Freddy Krueger, a prostitute sees her pimp, a morgue assistant instantly contracts and dies from the Hanta virus, etc.

Plunking Mulder and Scully down into this gritty, street-level milieu and watching their differing reactions to the COPS camera are X-COPS' prime pleasures. Duchovny and Anderson seem to be having great fun, with Mulder loving the attention from the COPS crew and "turning on" for the camera; Scully (in high dudgeon mode) finding the crew obtrusive, embarrassed to be on national television. The relationship between Mulder and Wetzel briefly takes on some resonance, when Wetzel, afraid to tell anyone he saw a wasp man, mentions to Mulder that it's hard to have a career in law enforcement when everyone thinks you're nuts, and Mulder responds, "Tell me about it."

See sidebar, page 32.



Cyberbabe Jade Blue Afterglow (Krista Allen) in "First Person Shooter," a William Gibson script that plays like a leftover from HARSH REALM.

"Welcome to the land where silicon meets silicone!"
—Langley

FIRST PERSON SHOOTER ★

2/27/00. Written by William Gibson & Tom Maddox. Directed by Chris Carter. Editor: Heather Macdougall.

This is the only episode Chris Carter directed seventh season (and his first directing effort on someone else's script). As the crowning touch of his directorial effort, he gives us one last shot of Scully's face—digitally rendered and plastered onto the hugely-endowed, barely-clad bod of a cyber-fantasy-babe. To quote Kurtz, the horror, the horror.

Since this is a virtual reality story, there must be a pile of unused HARSH REALM scripts right next to the MILLENNIUM stack. This one happens to be written by William Gibson and Tom Maddox. But you would never know from "First Person Shooter" that Gibson is one of the finest, most respected authors of literary science fiction.

Mulder and Scully investigate the mysterious death of a young man named Retro, who was testing a new and extremely violent virtual reality

Mulder and Deputy Chief Wetzel (Judson Mills) in COPS crossover "X-Cops," the series' 150th episode and one of the season's better efforts.



X-FILES

THE LONE GUNMEN

A spin-off series a la MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

By Dan Persons

In a startling break with fans' expectations, the new LONE GUNMEN series will actually be a half-hour sitcom in which America's favorite conspiracy theorists give up their espionage-obsessed ways and decide to make a go of it running the nuttiest diner in Maryland. Come join Frohike, Langly, and Byers as they sling hash and trade quips with a regular cast of wacky customers, including Theodore, the dyslexic National Security Council operative, Nancy, the double-jointed White House intern, and Tyrone, the African-American Grand Wizard of the local KKK cell. Kidding, just kidding.

In actuality, THE LONE GUNMEN—which features the mighty intellectual powers of the computer nerds who regularly assisted Scully and Mulder with their investigations (as portrayed by Tom Braidwood, Dean Haglund, and Bruce Harwood)—will be a legitimate spin-off from THE X-FILES. And while the scenario cited above may well have sold back in the days when the Fox network was desperate for a comedy hit (in other words, pre-MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE), the concept is only nominally less of a shock than Fox's eleventh hour decision to split off the cyber-trio into their own series. "No one was more surprised than me when they phoned up in February and said, 'How would you like to do a LONE GUNMEN pilot?'" admitted Tom "Frohike" Braidwood. "I mean, we'd joked about it over the years, but I certainly never seriously thought that they would do anything like that. But they have."

What winds up on TV screens when the program debuts next year will definitely be drama, though not necessarily the kind the X-FILES fans might expect. "The tone is probably more along the lines of MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE," said Braidwood. "The show itself won't go the route of THE X-FILES. It will go the conspiracy route, but



Now all they need is a snappy theme: Zuleikha Robinson joins Dean Haglund, Tom Braidwood and Bruce Harwood in the pilot as a mid-season replacement.

it's more real conspiracies and government and espionage and that kind of thing. It won't be delving into the unknown."

Still, with Chris Carter taking point as executive producer, and the team of Carter, Frank Spotnitz, and Vince Gilligan copping credit for the pilot script, the spin-off will likely carry forward on the story-telling qualities of its progenitor. "The whole team got down on the drawing board and worked on it together," said Braidwood. "I liked the script, I thought it was pretty tight. It was a good story line with good action and a certain amount of humor. Nice amount of humor—not comedy, but humor."

"The thing that impressed me the most was the delineation of the characters, particularly the three Lone Gunmen. I think both the script and the director were looking to make the characters very individual, and I think they've done that."

While Carter relied on his trusted captains to deliver a level of textual continuity with THE X-FILES, he turned to some seasoned crew to provide the visual link. "It was a minor variation," said D.P. Robert McLachlan, who also worked on Carter's MILLENNIUM, as well as James Wong and Glen Morgan's FINAL DESTINATION. "I never shot THE X-FILES. Some aspects of it, visually, I really like, and others I don't. Sometimes I find it a bit too self-conscious

in its efforts to be dark. Personally, that kind of throws me out of a story, because it just seems forced. You can't inflict a look on a scene if it's not there in the script and on the location.

"Having said that, there was an effort to be true to [THE LONE GUNMEN's] X-FILES roots in terms of how we shot it. But, again, because it was a slightly lighter tone, we did alter things a little—not so much with the lighting and the sets, but in the way we actually photographed our heroes. The lighting was closer to what I did on MILLENNIUM than THE X-FILES. That's a matter of personal taste, actually; I like a more limited

palate in the color of light that I use. I find that it's more tasteful, so I used less bright colors than you've seen in the Lone Gunmen's subterranean headquarters. I think it's more simple and clean. Chris Carter and the rest of the producers on the show were very happy with how it looks so far."

The decision-makers at Fox have clearly joined Carter and crew in their delight, enough so to give THE LONE GUNMEN the full go-ahead, likely as a mid-season replacement to debut at the beginning of 2001. Whatever the outcome of the new venture, though, Braidwood seemed satisfied with the experience, noting that his character has taken him further than he ever dreamed. "This is obviously something that's caught the imagination of the viewers and that they wanted to see more of. So that's what the producers are giving them. When I initially did it, there was never any thought in my mind that it was going to be anything else than one day of work."

"One of the nice things about this, and one of its strengths, is that [Bruce, Dean and I] have a very good relationship, which has developed over the seven years. The odd times that we've met and worked together, we've always had a very solid relationship, we're always seen each other as equals, we've seen each other as a unit. We have fun both on-set and off-set when we're together." □

X-FILES

THE MAKING OF "X-COPS"

Behind-the-scenes, filming the popular crossover.

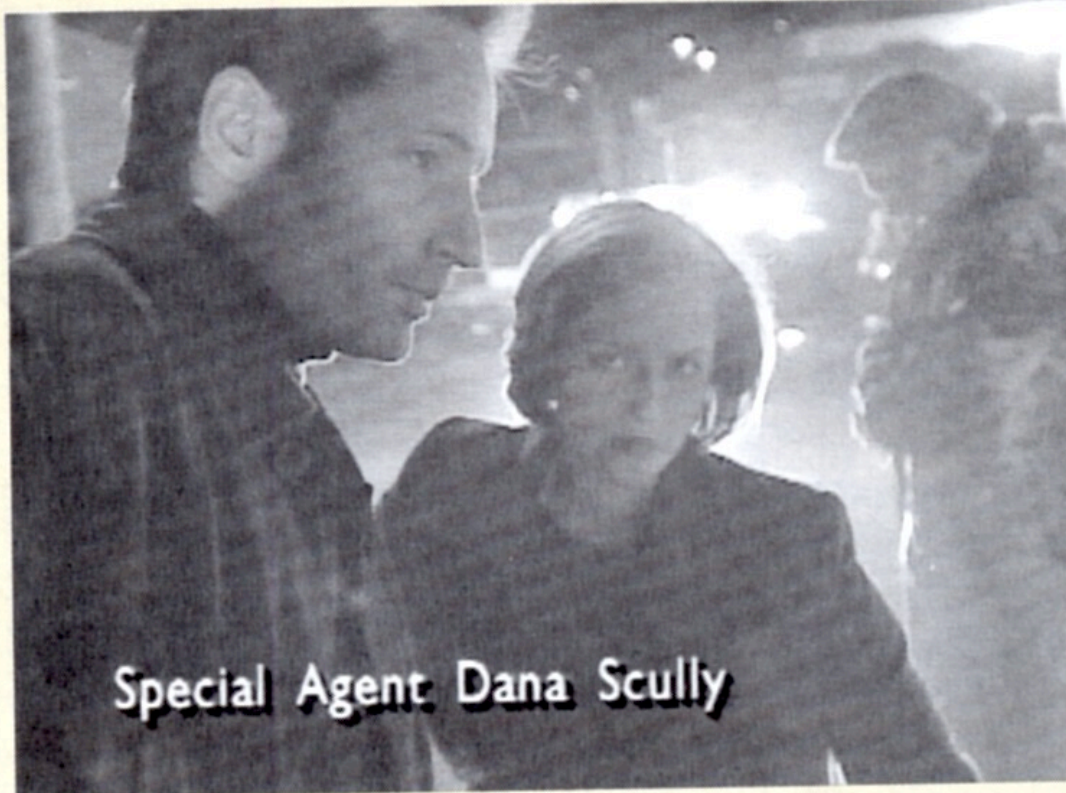
By Dan Persons

In the had-to-happen-sooner-or-later category, two Fox classics finally joined forces in the X-FILES episode, "X-Cops." No, Mulder didn't discover that THE FAMILY GUY was actually an evil mind-control plot engineered by the Cigarette Smoking Man—instead, the ever-questing FBI agent and his partner Scully found themselves smack in the middle of a shoot for the reality TV series COPS. Better them than Luke Perry, I guess.

Shot on videotape in the less-than-glamorous environs of Venice, California, "X-Cops" finds Scully and Mulder joining forces with the L.A. County Sheriff's department and trailed by a camera crew (which quickly multiplies once the producers realize that they're no longer covering a typical crack-house bust), all on a quest for a homicidal monster who comes out only during the full moon.

"It was an idea that I'd always wanted to do for at least two or three seasons," said episode author Vince Gilligan. "Way back, I think, in Season 4, I approached Chris Carter with the idea of having a crossover episode between the show COPS and our show. It seemed a natural to me, because I was thinking that with Mulder and Scully at the heart of it, THE X-FILES is a cop show. What if they were to just one day appear on the TV show COPS? I was milling that around in my head; I pitched it to Chris, and at the time he was a little reluctant. But one thing led to another and I got to do it [seventh] season.

"The longer we've been on the air, the more chances we've taken. We try to keep the show fresh; we try very hard not to do the same old thing. I think [Carter] appreciated that, saw the positive side to that. To be frank, and I don't know if this was his thinking, it might have been a part of the network's, this was a good [way to play off] THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. That



Special Agent Dana Scully

Shot on videotape COPS-style, Mulder and Scully track a homicidal monster, an X-FILES script idea Vince Gilligan first broached as far back as season four.

movie came out and did very well and essentially was a story about strange and scary goings-on being caught live on videotape, and that's in a sense what this is."

Of course, merging the reality of COPS with the imagination of THE X-FILES meant some delicate maneuvers on the part of the storyline. Said Gilligan, "It was something that I got myself into by pushing so hard to do this episode. It was interesting. The hardest single thing was that we all agreed from the beginning that, if the conceit is that Mulder and Scully are on a national television show, we can't really give proof of the paranormal on national TV, as it were. So we tied our own hands, saying that we can't really show a monster, it could only be hinted at. Then THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT came out and showed us how you could do that in a way and still make it scary. Hopefully, we succeeded in that regard. Basically, Mulder gets on national TV, and the reason why he likes being on TV is that he's hoping he can get proof of the paranormal cashiered on videotape for an audience of millions to see. And, of course, as it usually works out on THE X-FILES, we experience some pretty weird things, but we never give the concrete proof that he's been after. So it's a little bit of a

disappointment for him at the end, he doesn't really have the proof he wants. If we were to give him that, it would change the whole direction of the series."

Directing duties on "X-Cops" were handled by Michael Watkins, who, as producer, helped get the series up to speed during its move to California, and has since helmed several episodes, including seventh season's mythos offerings "Amor Fati" and "Sein und Zeit." "It was a lot of fun," Watkins said of the "X-Cops" experience. "We all watch COPS here, and we got ahold of [executive producer] John Langley—this clearly is an homage to COPS. We changed the format from film to video and really

shot it in the style of COPS, true to form: following the back of the head; panning through cars; doing long, long 'oners,' [takes]—very long oners; five, six pages—starting on one block where the officers are in a staging area and getting some information, moving over to Mulder and Scully, walking down a block and half and running behind them, then going right inside a crack house and going through the crack house, seeing the arrests, feeling that blackness and that scariness, finding the body, hearing the gunshots up the street, turning around, running out, all without a cut.

"It would be long rehearsals; we'd have 17 talking parts and 35 people; we had helicopters with night-skies flying overhead; we would walk-through with stunt drivers and people moving all around. We'd just do long rehearsals, walking rehearsals. There were four cameramen there—basically all of us ended up shooting the show. Sometimes we let the operator see the scene and sometimes not—we'd let him come in there cold. The trick was putting together the dramatic moments within this videotape homage."

It turned out that the shift from the expected, cinematic approach of the typical X-FILES episode to a more verité style of filmmaking was one of the larger hurdles for



Mulder and Scully get busted, finding themselves smack in the middle of a shoot for Fox's reality-based series *COPS*, a clever 7th season crossover scripted by Vince Gilligan and directed by Michael Watkins.

the show's actors to overcome. "The first day or two was difficult," Watkins admitted. "The actors came in thinking, 'Okay, we'll do a master, there'll be my close-up here, we'll work on that...'" It took everyone a couple of days to really get a sense of, 'By gosh, we're going.' Once that started happening, an interesting phenomenon occurred: the first day or so we'd do eight, nine, ten, eleven takes before we would pick one. Once they were there with it, suddenly we were doing two takes. That was even more shocking. In a sense we were doing theater: we were doing an act, or half of a whole act in one take."

Which didn't mean that the tricks of the trade were completely ignored. A surreptitious cut during the teaser replaced actor Judson Mills—playing doomed rookie Keith Wetzel—with a stunt person for the moment when both cop and camera crew were trapped in an overturning police car. Meanwhile, Watkins—shooting largely in sequence—worked to avoid such manipulations. "We'd start a scene in one neighborhood, drive a mile and a half away, get out and finish it—and we're talking a lot of people at each end, and in the middle between the destinations. Everyone really got into it. I think that what it did was really pack the realism, the naturalness, onto the tape. If there was an accident, if there was a flub, if [the actors] were searching for something, we'd stay in there with them and keep it real. Everyone supported everyone, and I thought it got to be a lot of fun."

Judson Mills, who's better known to viewers for his work as Gage on *WALKER*,

“The longer we’ve been on the air, the more chances we’ve taken. We try to keep the show fresh. I think [Carter] appreciated that, saw the positive side to it.”

—Writer Vince Gilligan—

was dealing with, like the cats running around, or the people walking across the street while I was driving, or sounds and events, you had to incorporate them all into what was going on, so much of it was on the fly. I thought it added a real element of excitement to the work—you started here and you did some dialogue, then you drove a few blocks and something happened and you took off and you raced around a few more blocks, and then you stopped and got out and talked some more, and then you did some more stuff and went to a house and went around the back and got chased and it's all one big, long take. There's no stopping, and if you stop or if you blow it, it's back to square one for everybody.

"It was actually quite funny driving around dressed as a cop in those cars, doing what we were doing. There was so little crew around and so little supervision that people just behaved as though we were cops. I had other cops waving and giving their signals or heads-up the way that they do amongst themselves. It was quite funny to see how differently people reacted to you, really believing you're a cop. A lot of things, like people walking across the street, or the black cat that showed up in the opening scene, were just stuff that took place that we had to deal with in the moment." □

TEXAS RANGER, claimed the unorthodox production process was not quite the hardship some might fear: "I really enjoyed it. I prefer working that way, it's very much like being in theater. It was very exciting, because Michael Watkins was wonderful about giving us a little latitude to go in the moment with what was going on. In a lot of the takes, the things that I

game called "First Person Shooter." Somehow the young man died for real, shot through the chest, even though all the opponents were completely digital creations. Investigation reveals a gorgeous female figure inside the game shot Retro, and her elimination becomes even more paramount when she cuts off the hands and head of another young man sent into the game to defeat her.

It's hard to believe that William Gibson, one of science fiction's finest authors, and writing partner Tom Maddox came up with this piece of nonsense. First of all, the x-file itself becomes completely lost amongst the digital mayhem. The two bodies are there, the question is asked how they really died—but no one, not even Scully, ventures a real-world explanation. So we are supposed to believe that a digital character can physically kill people. In fact, we're supposed to believe that a real person can be sucked into the digital world of the game so that he physically disappears, as happens with Mulder. It's not really a computer game, it's more like a virtual reality laser tag, played out in a huge game space.

But "First Person Shooter" pretends to have ambitions beyond giving us a really good shoot-out. It wants to critique, through the prism of the computer gaming industry, male assumptions and aggressiveness, but its portraits of men are so cartoonish that it really has nothing to say about how men truly think and act. It indulges in so many scenes of violence that it becomes the thing it is critiquing; it loves its gunplay far too much. The women—woman, actually, there is a lone female programmer, named Phoebe (Constance Zimmer)—are no better than the men and just as stereotyped. Phoebe is an anxiety-ridden wimp. She created Maitreya, the female slayer, to be everything she cannot be—but, as it turns out, Maitreya's killer aggression is derived from the pumped-up testosterone released by the men playing the game. So much for female independence, even when it comes to killing; Maitreya, too, is at the mercy of those nasty male hormones, not to mention that her design is every bit as appealing to the testosterone-driven as any male-created digital babe. Phoebe's design instincts are not exactly liberated. Of course, no one offers an explanation on how real life testosterone pumping into a man's system can affect a digital character.

Ironically, the one truly human moment in this story comes with the appearance of the real-life model for Maitreya, a superhumanly gorgeous woman called Jade Blue Afterglow, played by Krista Allen of the *EMMANUELLE* movies. Allen is not a great actress by any means, but she manages to convey, in a quietly contemptuous way, Jade Blue's disdain for the stupid police officers (they're just as caricatured as any other male in this episode) sniffing around her.

Finally, then there's the spectacle of Mulder, and later Scully, going into the game to save the Lone Gunmen, who have invested money in "First Person Shooter" and have been trying to figure out what went wrong in the game space. When the

Decked out in super-cool sunglasses and body armour in "First Person Shooter," Mulder's silliest moment in a script by William Gibson.



game comes on by itself, threatening the trio, Mulder comes to the rescue, decked out in super-cool sunglasses (Why? It's dark in there!), leather body armor, and a gun the size of the Empire State Building. It's the silliest shot of Mulder ever, and not even meant as a humorous comment (unlike, say, the shot of "GQ Mulder" in "Humbug"). That Scully has to go into the game to save Mulder's ineffectual ass doesn't say anything, since she is just as ineffectual as he. The game is finally shut down from the control booth in one of those last-minute saves you see only on TV and in the movies. (Why didn't they just unplug the computer to begin with?) Scully's donning of FPS leather turns out to be merely an excuse to give Zack the programmer the idea to turn her into the next super-cyber-babe, as explained in a supremely unnecessary, supremely moronic, last-minute Mulder monologue.

The special effects are effective enough, but they're eye candy; they're there simply because this is a virtual reality story. They don't add to the story. A lot of guns get shot off in "First Person Shooter," but it's still a misfire from beginning to end.

"Stinky's good."

—Peattie

THEEF

★★ 1/2

3/5/00. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

"Theef" is a revenge drama, so no wonder that vengeful Appalachian father, Mr. Peattie (Billy Drago), speaks like a character not all that far removed from a bloodthirsty play of the Jacobean era. His target is the family of wealthy San Francisco doctor Robert Wieder (James Morrison), who Peattie blames for killing his daughter. The young woman had been mortally injured in a horrific bus accident and emergency room physician Wieder "pushed" her morphine to the point that she died perhaps 20 minutes earlier than she would have anyway. But Peattie, a folk magician, feels that Wieder had no right to end her life, even if it also ended her suffering, and that if he, Peattie, had been there, he might have saved her with his charms and potions. He believes Wieder has robbed him of his daughter; and thus (in Peattie's antiquated spelling, written in blood on Wieder's living-room wall), Wieder is a "theef." The stage is set for a confrontation between the power of modern medicine and the efficacy of folk magic. This being THE X-FILES, magic wins out, until stopped by technology in the form of a bullet.

Mulder and Scully step into this confrontation when Wieder's family members start dying in strange and unaccountable ways, thanks to Peattie's black magic spells. His favorite charm is a doll, called a "poppet," stuffed with a photo of the victim, which he then mutilates in some way

Billy Drago as Peattie, an Appalachian folk magician who exacts revenge on the physician who failed to save the life of his daughter.

X-FILES

VINCE GILLIGAN

The writer/producer on devising some of 7th season's best shows.

By Dan Persons

Vince Gilligan was at it again. In "Hungry," he dared us to have sympathy for the Devil, this time presenting the story from the point of view of a monster trying desperately to overcome his own monstrousness. In "Theef," he suggested that the most benevolent of us are not immune to the furies of blind vengeance. In "X-Cops," he pushed at the seams of an X-FILES story so hard that it wound-up tumbling smack into the middle of a COPS shoot. Give the guy his props: when he sits behind the keyboard to actually script an episode, phrases like "typical X-FILES episode" go right out the window.

"It's not conscious," said Gilligan of his tendency towards writing envelope-pushing scenarios. "We're always trying to outdo ourselves and give the audience something it hasn't seen before. But as far as how we decide the mix: 'Is this episode going to be a funny one, a serious one?' it doesn't really work like that. It's more about us saying, 'What's going to be a good episode this week?' Just sometimes you start with a great scene in your head, a great, scary moment. Sometimes you start with a funny line or a funny character you thought of, or a scary character. It just sort of takes on a life of its own. That's why, probably, [sixth] season, we did a lot of lighter episodes, more humorous episodes."

Gilligan got an early start to toying with THE X-FILES formula [seventh] season, offering up "Hungry," about a predator who feasts on human brains and how his efforts to overcome his addiction eventually lead to disaster. The twist: this time the story took



Gilligan, devising off-beat entries like "Hungry," "Theef" and "X-Cops."

eavesdropping on them through the ordering microphone at the restaurant. Playing it all from this guy's point of view was fun, it was interesting. Of course, it made it really hard to write—I figured, if this guy is going to be the guy we follow throughout the show, we've got to understand why he does what he does, and we have to sympathize with him on some level. I figured the best way to sympathize with this guy was to show these terrible things he does, but then realize that he hates himself for doing them.

"When we were halfway through it, someone said to me, 'It's a lot like M, the movie with Peter Lorre.' I said, 'Yeah, I guess it is.' I hadn't really thought of that in advance." A not-dissimilar empathy was at work when Gilligan joined forces with John Shiban and Frank Spotnitz to script "Theef," a tale in which a conjure-man sets his powers against the doctor who, he feels, has destroyed his life.

"It's a story about modern medicine versus mountain magic," Gilligan said. "Essentially, it's a revenge story in which there's a very well-respected and brilliant doctor in the San Francisco Bay area who's just a really

the monster's part, following events from his point of view while Mulder and Scully became occasional, and threatening, walk-ons in the unfortunate creature's life. Said Gilligan, "The idea originally was that we do so many monster shows, what if we did one from the monster's point of view, so that Mulder and Scully are occasionally interloping into this guy's life? We don't know what's going on with them when they're not in his presence, we don't have their usual back-and-forth banter, except in the beginning when he's



Chad E. Donella as Rob Roberts in "Hungry," Gilligan's mutant-of-the-week episode about a boy who longs to be normal but is compelled to eat people's brains, which he sucks out of their skulls, with Judith Hoag.

nice guy. He's a good doctor, he works in a hospital—suddenly, he's got this guy setting out to destroy his family and he doesn't know why. It's a guy from Appalachia who practices mountain magic, which is this stuff we researched into.

"As we try to do with most of our stuff, it's based, if not on reality, then at least on pre-existing myth about Appalachian folk magic.

Whether it's real or not I won't get into, but it's [supposed to be] mostly beneficial stuff: healing people, healing the sick, making people's lives good. But this guy uses it for evil, and he uses these things called 'pop-pets,' which are basically voodoo dolls. It's sort of a Scottish/Appalachian folk magic. This guy is basically destroying this good doctor's life because the doctor made a very valid call in the E.R. one day and didn't save this Appalachian guy's daughter who had been in a terrible bus accident. The doctor did him wrong and ruined his family, so now he's out to get him.

"You don't really understand where the guy's coming from until later in the episode. When you do, it's not as if you suddenly feel he's right, but that you at least understand where he's coming from; you understand why he does what he does. I don't know why I do that, it's just, I guess, to me the world doesn't make a lot of sense. You hear about horrible things like the high-school shootings in Littleton, those kinds of things that are just terrible and you can't make sense out of them when you're watching them on the TV. When I write about stuff like that, the stuff that happens in our episodes is pretty terrible, too, but maybe it's me trying to figure out why people do

“Every now and then we like to throw the fans a curve ball, to make it clear we're still trying our hardest, doing our best to keep the show fresh and original.”

—Scripter Vince Gilligan—

the things they do. Mainly it's trying to be entertaining, but it just seems more interesting to explain why the bad guy's bad than just to say 'He's evil,' and that's all there is to it."

Gilligan pointed to one extra real-life wrinkle that locked in seventh season's "X-Cops" sense of believability: "The neat thing for me was that every cop you saw in the show, except for the two

main characters, is a real, working, L.A. County deputy. [They were] on their days off and gave the show a tremendous amount of reality and a tremendous amount of technical accuracy that we couldn't have pulled off with just actors. They helped the real actors look more like cops; they just gave the whole thing an air of authenticity."

Do the stories that break out of the expected X-FILES box ever make Gilligan nervous? "They do, they absolutely do. But we've all been here a while now—I've been with the show for four years and the show's been running seven.

"We still love writing middle-of-the-road, straight-down-the-middle X-FILES, and we still plan that the bulk of our shows should be just good, scary X-FILES, the kind of shows the fans have been tuning in to see since season one. But every now and then we like to throw the fans a curve ball, just to make it clear that we're still trying our hardest, doing our best to keep the show fresh and original.

"Sometimes maybe we go too far out on a limb—I have probably been guilty of that before. It make me nervous every time we do something like this, but that nervousness is also excitement. It keeps us interested." □

that is instantly felt by the real person.

Although "Theef" is burdened with some illogical plot developments and some underdeveloped characterization, overall it is a decent installment of THE X-FILES. It has a fine guest actor in James Morrison (McQueen in SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND) as Wieder, who ably captures all of Wieder's agony and guilt over his father-in-law and wife's deaths, and his ambivalence concerning his role in Lynn Peattie's death, however justified he still feels he may have been in administering the overdose of morphine. The episode also has one of TV's consummate villains, Billy Drago, his face more ravaged than ever, as the unrelenting father. And every fear one has of hospital procedures is summed up in a memorably gruesome scene when Wieder places his stricken wife (the elegant Kate McNeil) into an MRI machine, assuring her all will be fine; then, a minute later, when he notices her legs thrashing, he pulls out her charred remains. Peattie has cooked her poppet in the hospital cafeteria's microwave, using modern technology to serve his magic and thus cause the malfunction of another device of modern technology. Pamela Gordon contributes a comic performance as the basso-voiced proprietor of a folk charm shop.

Drago's character does not receive the full treatment he deserves. With his quaint speech and enchanted goofer dust, he is like a wizard out of another time and place, a Prospero deserted by Miranda and become malign by her loss. He also comes off as an ignorant backwoods hick, never allotted the full dimension of his grief. Perhaps if he been treated with more ambiguity and allowed to realize that his murders not only would not bring back Lynn, but have made him even worse than the doctor he so despises, he might have been one of THE X-FILES' most compelling villains.

"What the hell are you doing?" —Scully

"God's work, what else?" —The Cigarette Smoking Man

EN AMI ★ 1/2

3/19/00. Written by William B. Davis. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

Did someone remove Scully's brain and fill the empty space with straw? In last season's "Milagro," she had a preposterous attraction to a stalker. In "En ami," written by the Cigarette Smoking Man himself, William B. Davis, she is so tempted by one of the CSM's propositions that she ditches Mulder (payback for all the times he's ditched her?) and goes off on a road trip to Pennsylvania, hoping against hope that the CSM will deliver on his promise. They are to meet "Cobra," a government scientist who has agreed to hand over a disc with alien-derived information that will cure all human disease.

Since the CSM is involved, "En Ami" is full of the expected twists and turns. Surprise, the CSM's

The CSM adds sexual predator to his dossier of villainy in "En Ami," as Scully undresses during their cross-country road trip. Is he the father?



X-FILES

WILLIAM B. DAVIS

The Cigarette Smoking Man on turning scripter.

By Dan Persons

Fans of THE X-FILES have already come to the conclusion that the series, in and of itself, is a modern-day classic. But when William B. Davis, the actor best known for his seven-season stint as the malevolent Cigarette Smoking Man, decided to script a seventh season episode in which Dana Scully must set aside her fears of the CSM for the potential benefit of all humankind, the newly-minted author decided to rely on a classic with a bit more pedigree.

"The idea was originally derived from Richard III," Davis said. "There's a famous scene between Richard III and Lady Anne in which Richard realizes, despite the fact that he murdered Lady Anne's husband and her father-in-law, she is the person he needs to marry in order to further his ambitions. So he happens to come upon her while she's mourning her father-in-law—she's obviously furious with him—and, in the process of 15 minutes or so, convinces her he's done it all for love of her. She just about agrees to marry him at the end. It's one of the most amazing scenes in dramatic literature, where the villain puts on an act to gain his effect. In Richard, he has the advantage of a soliloquy to the audience, so he can say to them, 'Now look what I'm going to do...' In television, we can't do that. In an earlier version, when Fowley was still alive, I had her as a confidant. CSM could tell Fowley what he was going to do and the audience would know it was an act. As it comes out now, we don't know."

The resulting episode, "En Ami," was Davis' first script for the series, though not for lack of trying. "I experimented with ideas for the show for some time," the actor admitted. "But I found it quite challenging to get an idea that really worked. I would get so far with something and I'd think, 'Nope, this doesn't work,' and I'd toss it off. It wasn't really until I got to this one that I felt confident enough to go to [the producers] and present it as an idea.

"It was rather different when I presented it. It was more something that would have



Davis wrote the script for "En Ami," only to be killed-off in season-ender "Requiem." The CSM refused to give-up smoking, using a tracheotomy tube out of DEAD AGAIN.

gone on inside Scully's mind, it would be kind of like her nightmare of CSM. That would have been an interesting counterbalance to the second episode of this season [the LAST TEMPTATION-like "Amor Fati"], which was sort of Mulder's dream of CSM. But they kind of felt they'd done the dream idea enough. They really liked the idea of that dynamic, though, and wanted it to be real, something that really happened. And so we started there, working out a storyline that we all were happy with. I wrote the script, then Chris Carter re-wrote the script—which I gather is quite common—and that's what went to air."

In the episode, the Cigarette Smoking Man appeals to Scully's sympathy, informing her that he's dying of cancer but that, with her help, he may be able to acquire information on an alien technology that could result in the elimination of cancer for all time. Moved but cautious, Scully agrees to accompany her nemesis on a cross-country odyssey, CSM's sole condition being that Fox Mulder not know of their mission. The storyline thus became an ideal setup for extended exchanges

between erstwhile enemies Scully and CSM—a dramatic development that was by no means an accident, according to Davis: "To be candid, one of the reasons I wrote this thing in the first place was that I had waited six years and they still hadn't given me a scene with [Gillian Anderson]. So I did it myself.

"I found Scully's voice came quite well; as did Skinner's and the Lone Gunmen. I found myself not quite so sure with Mulder, oddly enough. That may have been because he was less fundamental to my storyline—he wasn't as engaged. Curiously, one of the things that was most re-written by Chris and the story department was CSM's dialogue, which I thought I might know something about. That was partly because I felt that he was a better actor than they felt. To put it another way, they were anxious that he should appear quite like he had appeared before, and not be so much of a surprise."

Which, as it turned out, left Davis with the not-inconsequential task of allowing Scully and the audience a more human

view of the Cigarette Smoking Man without robbing the character of his deadly mystery. Said Davis, "We talked about this. Frank Spotnitz fights against that. He's afraid of the thing losing its tension because too much sympathy accrues to the character. And yet, we are doing things in this and other episodes, that do show a side of him that may garner some sympathy."

From Davis' point of view, though, that's only a natural progression for a character who has survived seven seasons of shadowy doings. "He's certainly become more of a whole person, although not losing his position of symbolic evil. I think now, in the late stages of the series, there's a certain question of whether we want to show the underlying motives. Do we want to give the audience a chance to empathize with this character, or do we want to continue seeing him as an embodiment of evil? Sometimes I worry that they want to make him a little pathetic. I fight against that, whatever we do. But he's certainly become a much more complex character."

Fortunately for Davis, who, beyond THE



In "En Ami" Scully obtains alien-derived data that will supposedly cure all human disease, a script by Davis inspired by a scene in Shakespeare's "Richard III," the most amazing villainy in dramatic literature.

X-FILES, is active in Shakespearean theater and teaches drama classes, there's no confusion between the actor and his role. That's a helpful trait when one has to deal with an occasionally less-than-grounded public: "I don't think I've become this iconic figure. I'm an actor who plays this iconic figure, although I understand that there seems to be some confusion out there. I've had people kind of get confused. I always think, 'Wouldn't it be nice if people said, 'Oh, there's William B. Davis,' instead of 'Oh, there's the Smoking Man?'" I guess that's the nature of TV.

"Certainly, the people who talk to me seem to be quite clear that they understand that I'm an actor who plays this character. They don't come up to me as if I was going to behave like that. But I often hear about people who didn't come up to me. Here's an example: somebody said they thought they saw me standing outside my acting school, but then they realized that it wasn't me, because I was smiling. I mean, he was convinced! So that's odd. That's very odd."

In actuality, Davis remains as committed a fan of THE X-FILES as any viewer. Having seen the bulk of the seventh season episodes, he has developed his own opinions on the series' status, although he steadfastly cautions against looking at this climactic year as a summation of the entire series: "No, no I wouldn't say that at all, actually. Just kind of speaking as a fan, it's almost, to some extent, a new departure. One of the things that I noticed [this season] on the whole issue of the paranormal is

“[THE X-FILES] touched the nerve of not knowing what's real and what's not. It's the nerve of the '90s because of the Internet, because of computer technology.”

—Actor William B. Davis—

that, in the earlier seasons, the paranormal elements that were dealt with were quite often elements that a lot of people believe in...and a lot of people don't. Quite a lot of the paranormal things they've done this season have been things nobody believes in, like the character who's always lucky, for instance. In that way, it's not really impinging on our consciousness of the world as we really see it, it's more obviously fictional. I make no value judgement on that, but it's different, and it may have to be. I mean, how many paranormal things are there?"

Still, Davis feels that THE X-FILES' greatest value may be the way it successfully reflected the temper of its times. "I think its unique success was a product of the nineties. It really touched the nerve of not knowing what's real and what's not real. It was the nerve of the nineties, because of the Internet, because of computer technology, because of getting our information—if you like—from little dots on a screen rather than from print on a page. It changed the way people looked at the world. There's a whole lot to it, and I can talk for hours about it, but the essence of it is the uncertainty of what's real, what can be believed. And because there's an uncertainty about that, that breeds a paranoia, that breeds the possibility of conspiracies, and so on.

"I think THE X-FILES tapped that nerve in the nineties. That's what turned a good show into a phenomenon. I think now, it's just a good show again. Not because the show has changed—although it has—but because its time has passed." □

henchman shoots Cobra as soon as he hands the disc to Scully! Surprise, the CSM kills his henchman before the man finishes Scully off! And a major surprise: Scully discovers there's nothing on the disc after she takes it back to Washington for analysis! (Maybe Scully should have prepared for this adventure by reading the Charlie Brown comic strips where Lucy always pulls the football away at the last moment.)

And there's a new and distinctly unpleasant dimension to the CSM's attitude towards Scully: sexual predator. Over the years the highly unerotic CSM has been revealed as the ex-husband of Cassandra Spender and father of Jeffrey Spender, the ex-lover of Mrs. Mulder and possible father of Samantha and/or Fox (these paternity issues are almost as annoying as the Scully/Mulder-will-they-or-won't they storyline) and possible partner to kinky doings with Diana Fowley. In "En Ami," he first appears in a re-enactment of the classic molester-in-the-car-offering-candy scenario, although his candy is scientific information. He somehow drugs Scully during the trip (we don't see it), and off-camera, removes her clothes (recalling the similar off-camera actions of James Stewart in VERTIGO with Kim Novak), dresses her in pajamas and puts her to bed. Later he offers her a little black dress to wear to dinner, a dress that reveals much more décolletage than one is used to seeing on Scully. The CSM never makes an overt pass at Scully, but the expression in his eyes pretty much says it all. Like so many other character "developments" this season, the CSM's sexually charged treatment of Scully comes out of the blue.

The production design and cinematography of "En Ami" are stunningly beautiful; the lighting is lush and burnished. Gillian Anderson hasn't been lit this flatteringly in a long time. But it's all in service of mythologizing the CSM, who, despite an initially white-faced, sickly appearance, looks normal throughout the rest of the episode, and, at the end, assumes an aura of (unearned) tragedy.

There is one lovely scene in "En Ami," after Scully has returned and the Lone Gunmen try in vain to retrieve information off the disc. While the Lone Gunmen work, and Scully sits there, a silent Mulder boils in the room's doorway, unable to look at Scully. Not only has she done a very foolish thing and returned a dupe (as he could have told her she'd be), but she has usurped Mulder's place in his narrative, the one where he is the hero, too, the only one meant to face down the villain. How dare the CSM reject him! It's a painfully honest moment.

See Davis interview, page 28.

"I get the feeling you're not used to anyone taking care of you."

—Ellen Adderly to Mulder

CHIMERA

★★ 1/2

4/2/00. Written by Daniel Amann. Directed by Cliff Bole. Editor: Heather Macdougall.

The family unit, in THE X-FILES, is the locus

The monster of "Chimera" glimpsed fleetingly in a car window, as the rage of a Vermont woman turns her, Hyde-like, into a vengeful beast.



of betrayal, deception and pain, especially when the head of household also fulfills the role of public caretaker as a government employee. "Chimera" takes us into the heart of a quintessential X-FILES family, when Mulder journeys to bucolic Bethany, Vermont, to solve the murder of the daughter of a federal judge. By the end of the episode, Sheriff Phil Adderly (John Mese), a friendly, all-American kind of husband and father, will be exposed as a double adulterer; his lovers are the dead woman (a wife and mother and best friend of Adderly's wife, Ellen) and a local waitress (a neglectful single mom). To compound the tragedy, Ellen, the "good" wife and mother, literally turns out to be a murderous monster, spawned by those who have killed the bonds of family.

"Chimera" gets off to an awkward start, with Mulder and Scully on stakeout in a seamy section of Washington, hoping to catch a serial killer who's targeting prostitutes. It doesn't seem like an x-file, but nevertheless, that's what they're doing, and Scully hates their grimy surroundings. There's no real explanation given why Skinner assigns only Mulder to the Vermont case. (In real life, Gillian Anderson was busy prepping her writing and directing debut in the following week's "All Things," so her role in "Chimera" had to be reduced.)

In Bethany, Mulder stays at the home of Sheriff Adderly, his wife Ellen (Michelle Joyner) and their young daughter. He hears reports of ravens scaring the daughter of the dead woman, and then Ellen tells him she has seen a monster—a tall, filthy creature. The report of the monster and various broken mirrors and windows leads Mulder to suspect someone has summoned forth a creature to kill Martha, but before long he begins to unravel the real duplicity at the heart of the case, and by the end the origin of the monster is revealed: it is Ellen herself, whose suppressed rage at her husband's infidelities manifests itself in some kind of Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon. Director Cliff Bole reveals her fractured personality in a number of doubling shots, as we see Ellen's form reflected in mirrors and windows. Sometimes when she looks at the glass, what she sees (and what we see) is the face of the monster. No wonder the glass always shatters. Also, quite nicely, the victims first see the monster in a mirror, too, suggesting that they, too, are part of what makes up the monster.

"Ah, Hurricane Scully has arrived."
—Dr. Daniel Waterston

ALL THINGS

4/2/00. Written and directed by Gillian Anderson. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

Gillian Anderson makes her writing and directing debut with "All Things," an episode that takes us where this show has gone before: Scully in emotional crisis, torn between what

Scully in emotional crisis, torn between what her life might have been and what it is, has an epiphany in "All Things." Then it's back to reset.



Scully experiences a vision in front of the statue of Buddha in "All Things," an episode written and directed with a heavy hand by Gillian Anderson.

her life might have been and what it is. By the end, Scully has achieved another of those life-altering moments that, like so many others on THE X-FILES, will never again be mentioned. While one can respect Anderson's desire to penetrate Scully's heart and mind, her storyline is one that plays havoc with Scully's motivations and character as established in the past seven years, and her direction is heavy-handed at best.

A filing mishap at a hospital inadvertently leads Scully to a meeting with her med school teacher and former lover, Dr. Daniel Waterston (Nicolas Surovy), now admitted to the hospital as a cardiac patient. We soon learn that—right out of a soap opera—Scully's motivation for joining the FBI was not a desire to prove herself in law enforcement, capture predators and help the innocent, but to escape her memories of Waterston! Daniel is a most unattractive character—basically, he's a manipulative creep who expects Scully to believe him when he tells her he lives only for her—and a miscast Surovy does nothing to give him a modicum of vulnerability or sympathy.

Fate leads Scully to a Buddhist temple, where she experiences a vision of Daniel, transparent, his heart pumping in his chest. The next thing we know, Scully has abandoned Western rationalism entirely, and brought a holistic healer to Daniel's side. Even Mulder, who once denounced "New Age crap," would be shaking his head at this point. Scully's religious focus has always been on Catholicism; but Anderson, whose interest in Eastern thought and religion has been well-publicized and who said she wanted this episode to reflect her ideas, imposes the Eastern worldview as the framework for Scully's transformation, even though Scully hasn't evinced the slightest interest in it in the past, and its appearance here is most contrived. Perhaps even Anderson has doubts, since the healer pronounces a comatose Waterston on the verge of death, yet the doctor miraculously bounces back—although whether it's the healer, Scully's care, or Western medicine, is anyone's guess—just so Scully can finally tell him what an irresponsible person he's been and then bid him farewell. She's finally gotten over him.

Anderson's direction becomes self-indulgent, with endless close-ups of Scully's teary eyes and face, as she contemplates the emptiness of her life or worries over Daniel's failing body. To top things off, the episode suggests, in that maddening pre-adolescent X-FILES way, that Mulder and Scully may have slept together! It opens with Scully facing a bathroom mirror, putting her clothes on, rambling in voice-over yet another deadly monologue, this time about one's choices in life. She exits the apartment and the camera turns to the bed, where Mulder, obviously naked under the covers, is sleeping. Everything then proceeds in flashback, and at the end of the episode, Scully and Mulder, sitting on Mulder's couch, have a conversation

about Scully's experiences (this is actually a nice moment, since Scully and Mulder discuss their own lives with each other so infrequently). The scene ends with Mulder tucking a blanket around a sleeping Scully—in slow-motion once again, but this time the slow-motion breaks the episode's point of view, since all instances have up to now been from Scully's POV. Perhaps Mulder is having a little "clear" moment, too, but it's a blatant attempt to wring more sentiment out of a scene that was actually quite touching all by itself. The implication from Mulder tucking Scully in is that they don't sleep together, but the implication from the teaser is they do. Presumably, the teaser is meant to exemplify the choice not taken, but with its prominence at the top of the hour and the way Scully pulls down her sweater and the camera then focuses on naked Mulder, it also is meant to inflame. How very juvenile, and what a dishonest way to tell a story.

The production design, as always, is lovely. Scully's vision is carried out beautifully; Daniel's transparent chest, showing the pathways of energy, or "chakras," looks splendid. But to take Scully from diehard rationalist to mystic in one episode is too much to ask viewers to believe. She has been through seven years of paranormal experiences; not only should an entire arc taking a very hard look at this issue been aired several seasons ago, but it should have been done without bringing some old boyfriend into the mix. The dialectic of science and faith in a doctor who is a practicing Catholic and witness to many paranormal incidents is an issue that deserves treatment in and of itself, not just as part of an emotional crisis brought on by the re-emergence of an ex-lover. Oh well, it doesn't matter. In the next episode, "Brand X," Scully is back to her old self.

"America, man! E pluribus, uh..."
—Daryl Weaver

BRAND X

★★1/2

4/16/00. Written by Steven Maeda & Greg Walker. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

A riff on THE INSIDER about the consequences of tampering with Mother Nature, even when one is trying to do good with one's tampering. Mulder and Scully are called in to investigate the mysterious death of Morley Tobacco Co. scientist Jim Scobee (Rick Deats). They learn that the Morley had been developing genetically altered tobacco that the scientists hoped would be "safer" for the consumer, but tobacco bugs eating the altered plants also experienced unforeseen genetic changes. Daryl Weaver (Tobin Bell), the only surviving member of a Morley Tobacco Co. test group for the experimental cigarette, has passed on insect eggs to everyone he smokes around.

Not the series' most exciting episode, but, a solid story with interesting characters used well in

Scully comes to the aid of Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) when a tobacco company whistle-blower under his protection turns up dead in "Brand X."



the service of the plot. It's especially nice to have Skinner featured prominently, giving the underused Mitch Pileggi something worth biting into. Dennis Boutsikaras is excellent as the tired, worried Dr. Voss, who finally decides to speak out, while the Morley Tobacco lawyers admonish him about confidentiality. And Tobin Bell as Daryl Weaver is no stock villain; he's sort of spooky-looking, but he's really just an average joe who wants the genetically altered cigarettes.

Director Kim Manners conjures up some splendid images; for instance, the intimidating deep perspective shot of Mulder and Scully seated at a long table across from Dr. Voss and the tobacco company lawyers, or the moment when Weaver first appears as if conjured out of the swirling fog (standing in for cigarette smoke). Production designer Corey Kaplan adds a touch of weirdness through his design of Weaver's apartment building, with its tobacco-colored corridors and dilapidated apartments devoid of everything except the most basic pieces of furniture.

"Brand X" ends on one of the season's most chilling shots. Mulder, thanks to nicotine treatment, has survived the tobacco bug larvae infection, but is now addicted to the drug. With Morley being the Cigarette Smoking Man's own brand, the image of an addicted Mulder is not a pleasant one to contemplate.



Garry Shandling and Tea Leoni tumble into a coffin and begin making out in "Hollywood A.D.," ably written and directed by David Duchovny.

"Agent Scully, if I'm carrying Marilyn Monroe's purse, do you assume that I slept with JFK?"

—Skinner

HOLLYWOOD A.D.

★★1/2

4/30/00. Written and directed by David Duchovny. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

David Duchovny's second effort as writer and director, "Hollywood A.D.," might be regarded as the flip-side of his first episode, "The Unnatural." If "The Unnatural" is about the power of storytelling to reveal the truth of human (and alien) experience, "Hollywood A.D." is about the power of storytelling to distort and trivialize it, when the storytelling falls into the hands of people who want to use it to make a fast buck. The guilty parties, in this instance, are the folks in Hollywood who grind out movies (and, one might extrapolate, television) for a living. Hollywood shows up at the FBI in the person of producer Wayne Federman (played by himself), who wants to make a movie based on Mulder and Scully's experiences. This is not the first time we've had an outsider look at Mulder and Scully—author José Chung wrote about them in a book (in "José Chung's 'From Outer Space'") but at least Chung felt a responsibility to tell the truth as he saw it, and to draw larger, personal conclusions from it. Federman feels no such responsibility, and the end result is a movie of utter vapidness that makes Mulder and Scully look like fools. This travesty,

X-FILES

ROB BOWMAN

The Files auteur on his major discovery, Krycek's Nicholas Lea.

By Miwa Hirai

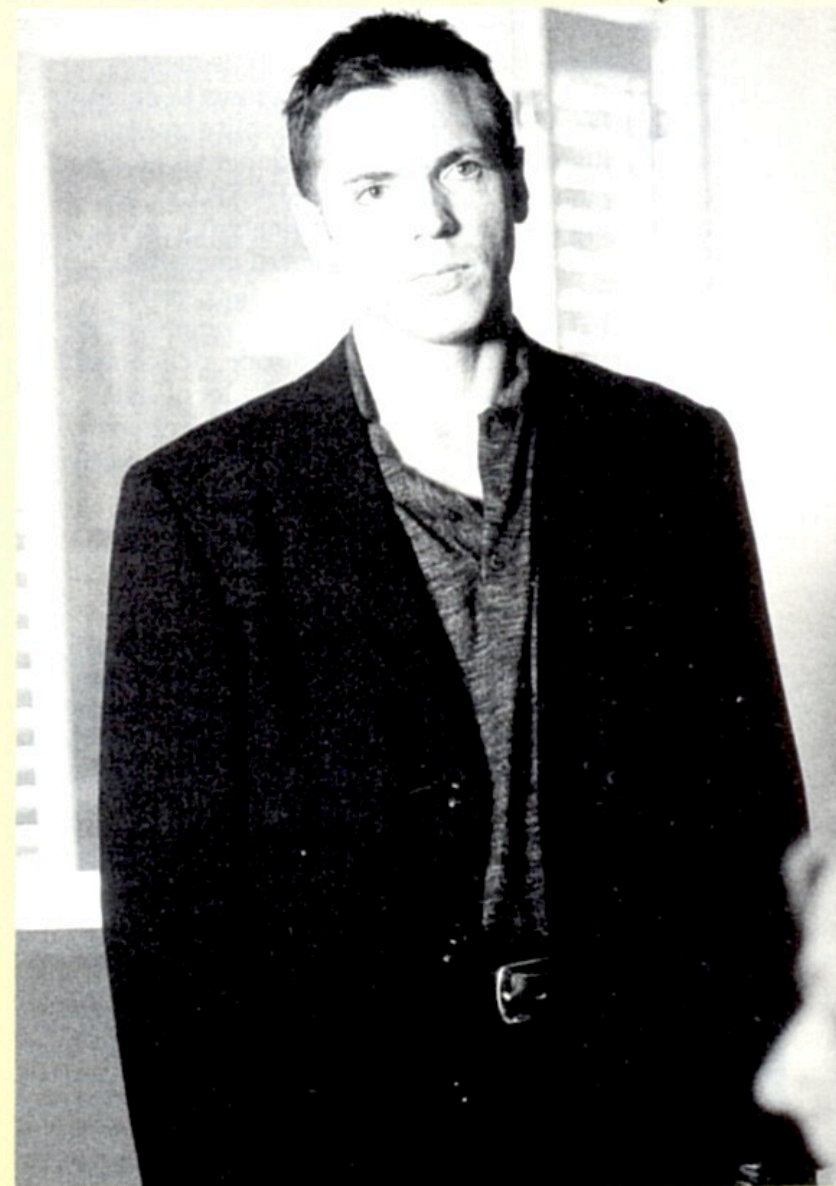
Rob Bowman, director of X-FILES—THE MOVIE, was side-lined most of season seven, directing a movie called RIP-TIDE. He returned only briefly to direct the Scully-centered episode "Orison," (see page 23).

Relaxing in his bungalow on the Fox lot, Bowman noted that he now eschews TV almost exclusively for film work, but THE X-FILES is the exception. "It's very different from other TV shows," he said. "It's a high-level, quality show which spends time and money. Every episode you've got to be a filmmaker, like we make a movie every episode." As to the future of the series, Bowman noted, "I would like the show to be a movie series. And I think it should be."

Bowman established himself as a director for the mythology episodes of THE X-FILES. That led him to the show's first movie, as a feature film director. "The script was very ambitious and originally expensive. We wanted the movie to be very successful although we only had 57 days for actual shooting as David [Duchovny] and Gillian [Anderson] had to go back to Vancouver for Season 5. We couldn't spend much time for prep, either. Moreover it was very difficult to shoot the complicated set. We shot various units throughout 80 days, 40 days for close-ups of monsters, and also shot buildings and facilities in Washington D.C."

The director had to wrap up the post-production duties of the film while he was shooting "The Pine Bluff Variant" in Season 5, which was the last episode he shot in Vancouver. Looking back on the Vancouver days, the first episode which Bowman directed on THE X-FILES was "Genderbender" in Season 1. This was probably the first episode that introduced sexual content into the show. Nicholas Lea, not as the infamous anti-hero Alex Krycek, played the role of a nightclub guy who'd survived an erotic experience with a sex-changing alien.

"At that time I had just finished a Warner Bros job, so I was looking for another thing



Nicholas Lea returned as Krycek in season-ender "Requiem." Bowman discovered Lea in first season's "Genderbender" and cast him as Krycek.

to do. I wanted to make a serious movie or something involving working hard. I like mysterious and spookier things. I just love entertainment. When I saw the X-FILES' pilot, I thought that was exactly what I wanted to do. It's darker, intelligent, and off-beat. It has everything I like. So I told my agent that I wanted to get involved.

"The script of 'Genderbender' was single-spaced description, very complicated. I asked Chris Carter how he would like me to shoot this. He said, 'Why don't you figure it out and let me know?'" Bowman giggled.

"In that episode, Nick's role was just a small one. We just wanted to have a clubguy. I thought Nick had a sort of chilly quality. When the role of Krycek came up, we did a little casting in Vancouver, but I re-

though, leads Mulder and Scully to a lovely conclusion: it is up to them to keep faith in what they believe, and not to let Hollywood take over their hearts and minds. Even with such a satisfying moral, "Hollywood A.D." doesn't work as well as "The Unnatural." Its two major threads, the actual X-file case worked by Mulder and Scully, and the Hollywood satire, don't blend as seamlessly as they should and the episode becomes disjointed.

The actual x-file, involving the Lazarus Bowl, a recording of the voice of Jesus Christ as he raised the dead, is one of the best x-file mysteries all season. In fact, it's so good that it would have made for a satisfying episode without a Hollywood satire appended to it. The story plays both to Scully's religious faith (her visions) and Mulder's belief in the paranormal. Duchovny, who has a gift for creating conversation on screen, gives Mulder and Scully a lot of breathing room; they talk, they joke, they lob points back and forth and you can see where they're going and how they got there. They seem human for the first time in quite a while.

Mulder and Scully's encounter with their big-screen counterparts, Gary Shandling and Tea Leoni (both playing pretentious to the hilt), is most amusing, especially when Scully shows Leoni how to run in high heels. But the triple split screen scene with Mulder, Scully and Skinner all in bubble baths—a tribute to *PILLOW TALK*, no doubt—is more clever than genuinely funny. Skinner, in fact, seems wildly out of character. Duchovny seems to imply, like the faux movie, *THE X-FILES* itself is a Hollywood version of the FBI, which, in virtually every episode, deliberately ignores the reality of the FBI—and a lot of other real-world things—for "dramatic effect," often to the point where *THE X-FILES* itself becomes only a tad less ludicrous than Federman's movie.

"Hollywood A.D." is strong evidence that Duchovny should continue with his writing career.



Scully's vision of Micah Hoffman (Paul Lieber) in "Hollywood A. D.," an X-File on the Lazarus Bowl, a recording of Christ, worthy of its own show.

"Mr. Damphus, I'm Special Agent Scully."

—Scully

"What's so special about you?"

—Daryl Weaver

FIGHT CLUB ★

5/7/00. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Paul Shapiro. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Unlike the film, "Fight Club" is not about a split personality, it's about doppelgangers—half sisters who look, sound and act exactly alike. The two women, Betty Templeton and Lulu Pfeiffer (both played by Kathy Griffin) have followed each other around the country for the past 12 years. Whenever they meet up, or are just thinking about each other, havoc erupts—people punch each other out, things explode, etc. Complications ensue when they both fall for the same man, a has-been wrestler named Bert Zupanic (Randall "Tex" Cobb). The episode takes place in Kansas City,

ally had a strong belief that Nick was the right choice. He seemed purely intelligent, having his own agenda. He's a very strong guy, big shoulders, and strong face. I would have 40 to 50 choices but I thought he was the right actor. I think Nick Lea, on screen, is gold. Any time Krycek is in the episode it's better," said Bowman of his *X-FILES* discovery.

"Since then we became friends. We spent a lot of time together on the set. Many great moments. I'm very proud about it because he was a great local Vancouver actor who became a very big part in the show. I wished he was in the movie, although it was different from the storyline of his involvement. I think he is the kind of actor who, given the right role, could be a movie star. Hope he does." Bowman smiled.

As a director, Bowman doesn't stop at mystery stories, the supernatural, the eerie, the grotesque. He shows the underlying layers of human weakness, turmoil, distress, betrayal, and love. The camera work that produces the characteristic aura is uniquely his, and endlessly beautiful.

"The Field Where I Died" in Season 4 is characteristic of his beautiful work. Mulder summons the same souls to be reincarnated together over and over again, and Melissa (Kristen Cloke) and Mulder are soulmates. "It's a tragedy and a romance. I wanted it to be more lyrical. I changed the color palettes to more browns and greens. I wanted to bring an old-fashioned feeling into it because originally the relationships are supposed to be in the Civil War. David was interesting in the story, as it did not begin from government conspiracy, but something deeper, more personal and emotional."

The episode with the most beautiful opening teaser is probably "Memento Mori" in Season 4. Rather than use a lot of movement, the imagery focused on Anderson's narration, as Scully, of the entries in her diary, for an even more realistic effect. The images worked to convey the power of her conviction as she faced her illness, as well as the raw fear she was feeling.

“THE X-FILES is not a science. We're not putting a space shuttle in it. We're acting...It's my job to put the best ideas into the show...New ideas are better.”

—Director Rob Bowman—



Bowman, looking forward to working on the next *X-FILES* movie, fitting in episode chores between his feature assignments.

"It is my favorite episode," said Bowman. "Mulder was the guy who always had an answer, a solution, or speculation. He approached a problem with a question. I remember the first take; David made a choice to be powerless. I suggested to him that he feel inside for the first time that he doesn't know the answer. He doesn't have a solution. I have to say his very first take was the most unique moment because David was looking for the right thing to say, 'Surely I can fix this, you can't fix this.' The scene really did give Mulder a different path through the rest of the episodes. He's worried that no matter what he does, what he finds, who will help him with things if Scully wasn't alive. That's a very unusual characteristic of Mulder.

"Scully is in power, determined. Mulder has been made powerless. He was emotional because it led to finding their relationship—that he is going to be there to help her anyway he can. It's still not romantic,

but they truly love each other on a new level," said the director.

"It's rare find to have two individual actors like David and Gillian. Their talents are very distinct and different from each other. Gillian has extraordinary instinct. At first, I thought Gillian might not understand Scully, but her acting instincts are great. Simple is the most elegant way.

"David is very smart. Either CSM or monsters, he knows how to make it real. That's the most typical thing I can imagine that an actor has to do. It's not going to be easy, but I believe it's a different challenge from acting with another person. He thinks he's really seen what he sees.

"There's no rule. *THE X-FILES* is not a science. We're not putting a space shuttle in it. We're acting. Your point of view of a story is different from mine. It really comes down to what's going to be. My idea doesn't have to be the right one. Gillian's, David's or Chris [Carter]'s idea, or whoever's, might be a better one. It's my job to put all the best ideas into the show, so that really strong pieces are possible. New ideas are better." □

which is located in two states, ha ha. "Fight Club" is meant to be one of X-FILES "comic" episodes (Mark Snow's overbearing, Mickey Mousing score tells us so repeatedly), but it is relentlessly unfunny.

Betty and Lulu are not the only doubles in this episode. Mulder and Scully become involved when they see slides of their doubles (played by their stand-ins, Arlene Pileggi and Steve Kiziak) who nearly killed each other while investigating the episode's initial punch-out between two identically-dressed missionaries). And at the end, we learn that Bert the wrestler has a double, too, so Betty and Lulu no longer have to clash over him. What is the point of all this doubleness? None, as far as can be gleaned from this episode. Scully does all the work in "Fight Club." Mulder becomes so inconsequential to the plot that he's blown into a sewer (thanks to another Betty/Lulu dust-up) and disappears for about a quarter of the episode.

The guest cast is one of the worst ever. Kathy Griffin as Betty and Lulu simply is not up to the task; she can not differentiate Betty and Lulu at all (you can only tell them apart by the color of their clothes) and she reads every line as if she were still on her cancelled sitcom, SUDDENLY SUSAN. Even worse is Randall "Tex" Cobb as Bert Zupanic. His acting is sub-sitcom and he makes for a completely unattractive character in every aspect. Between the two of them, Betty and Lulu and Bert are annoying, ignorant people we simply do not want to spend time with.

"Fight Club" shows more than ever that THE X-FILES is creatively exhausted. More and more, the confirmed eighth season looks to be nothing more than greediness on the part of 1013 and Fox, willing to milk the corpse of this cow dry because, somehow, it keeps pumping out green stuff with dollar signs on it.



Mulder and Scully encounter "Je Souhaite," a 500-year-old genie who dishes out sardonic wisdom on the boundless stupidity of humanity.

conversation with her—especially after she tells him she owes him three wishes. The look of dawning delight on Mulder's face is just right, as he suddenly realizes the world is his to wish for. This is where the heart of the episode lies, with idealistic Mulder asking for world peace, and Jenn telling him he has some ego in wanting her to change the hearts of six billion people. (He does wish for it, and to his horror, everyone on earth disappears. This gives us a priceless bit where Mulder rushes to Skinner's empty office and wishes everyone back while complaining to Jenn, only to find himself screaming in front of Skinner and various FBI brass.) Scully also shines here, when she observes to Mulder that one man shouldn't circumvent with a wish the ways of the world. In the end, Mulder realizes the wisdom of this, and instead of circumventing the ways of the entire world, he merely circumvents the ways of Jenn's world, by wishing her free.

Guest star Paula Sorge, who plays Jenn, the cynical, irony-ridden, completely modern genie, is one of the best guest actors of the season. Part of her charm is simply the way she looks: dressed all in black, coiffed with a black pageboy, she looks like she belongs in a New York fashion magazine's editorial offices; this is not your typical genie in pantaloons, vest and pointy shoes. Jenn has seen it all when it comes to human behavior; she has no more illusions left, and Sorge delivers her mocking lines with snap, bite and wonderful dark humor.

"It's not unreasonable. It's just a matter of reducing your vision."

—FBI Auditor Chesty

REQUIEM

★★

5/16/00. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

"Requiem" is the best mytharc episode and season finale in several years. But that's not saying much, considering the unholy mess the mytharc has become. And it ends on one of the most egregious missteps yet in the X-FILES mythology, which is saying much, because there have been so many.

Mulder and Scully travel to Bellfleur, Oregon, the site of the pilot episode. A dying Cigarette Smoking Man wants a crashed alien ship before it can "rebuild itself" and depart, to serve as the foundation of a new conspiracy to battle aliens. He orders Marita Covarrubias (Laurie Holden)—remember her?—to spring Krycek (Nicholas Lea)—remember him?—from a Tunisian prison. Mulder disappears aboard the repaired ship. Back in D.C., Scully, hospitalized, tells a Skinner, still devastated from the loss of Mulder, that she's pregnant.

There is also the question of the father. An alien baby is cheesy beyond all redemption. Could the CSM have been up to something really nasty when an unconscious Scully was in his clutches during "En Ami"? The most likely possibility is

Mulder, thanks to the teaser of "All Things." Chris Carter said in an interview that "Requiem" would refer back to "All Things," so naturally Mulder is now the number one Daddy candidate.

Mulder's story is also bungled somewhat; this is the fallout to no follow-up from "Closure." Since "Requiem" takes us back to Bellfleur, we can't help but compare the obsessed, passionate Mulder of the pilot—to the apathetic Mulder we see now. He seems to be doing his find-the-aliens thing by rote. One might construe that Mulder is suffering depression following the end of his quest, but the show itself has done nothing to suggest anything so logical. Any emotion he shows is focused not on aliens, but on Scully (but that's bungled, too). And the moment that should have been the climax of the season (now that the search for Samantha has ended) is presented far too casually. There is one superb idea here: that Mulder chooses, like Richard Dreyfuss in CLOSE ENCOUNTERS (or Bull in the series finale of NIGHT COURT!) to go with the aliens. But again, Mulder makes that choice with a singular lack of affect. There's no foreshadowing of the abduction, no pull for him towards the forest, no suspense, no terror, no exultation.

The real fun of "Requiem"—and the only hope of even a semi-decent eighth season—comes courtesy of the long-awaited return of the always-intense, always-watchable Nicholas Lea as Krycek, the series' most underused character. And Laurie Holden, as Marita Covarrubias, shows unexpected potential to turn into someone intriguing. Marita's and Krycek's offer to team up with Mulder and Scully is a bonafide and welcome surprise; it may very well create genuine tension and conflict next season. Nicholas Lea, as Krycek, energizes every scene he's in, and maybe, if Krycek plays a prominent role next season, we may also finally get that "all about Krycek" episode the show has needed for so long. The demise of the Cigarette Smoking Man, pushed, wheelchair and all, down the stairs by Krycek a la Richard Widmark in KISS OF DEATH, is definitely a good idea. The Cigarette Smoking Man was once one of the great television villains, but he's been toothless for far too long. Unfortunately, it's another one of those "is he or isn't he" kinds of deaths so beloved by THE X-FILES. Kudos, though, for the CSM's refusal to give up smoking (the cigarette in the tracheotomy tube is right out of DEAD AGAIN) and for his taste in buxom blonde nurses; he's a horny old devil right to the end.

If only next season could be the Alex and Marita show; these two lusty, conniving rogues would inject a jolt of electricity, mischievousness and sly fun into a exhausted show that's been running on fumes for far too long. They sure would be a lot more entertaining to watch than Scully giving birth to a baby. Unless it was Rosemary's baby. Maybe the CSM is the devil after all.

Nicholas Lea and Laurie Holden join Mulder and Skinner in "Requiem," and just might end-up anchoring the show next year when it returns?



Mulder pops his head out of the sewer in "Fight Club," a supposedly antic episode written by Chris Carter that fails to be even mildly amusing.

"Boink!"

—Mulder, doing I DREAM OF JEANNIE.

JE SOUHAITE

★★1/2

5/14/00. Written and directed by Vince Gilligan. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

X-FILES writer Vince Gilligan makes his directing debut with "Je Souhaite," the season's penultimate episode. You'd think we'd get an hour of mytharc at this point; instead, we get whimsy involving 500-year-old genie Jenn (Paula Sorge) granting wishes and dishing out sardonic observations about the boundless stupidity of humanity.

"Je Souhaite" would have worked better if it had consisted of a half-hour encounter between Mulder, Scully and Jenn, and dropped the guest cast of stereotypic poor Southerners.

The episode picks up only with Mulder and Jenn interacting—he's one of the few people she's encountered who can hold his own in a



From The X-Files To Cervantes

TILT

By Dan Persons

At the end of its fifth season, THE X-FILES switched production base, moving from Vancouver, Canada to Los Angeles, California. This allowed David Duchovny to spend more time with wife Téa, but also stranded the seasoned crew who, over the course of five years, had succeeded in making the show one of the most groundbreaking productions in television. So what did the spurned filmmakers do? They found other jobs, of course—this is Vancouver, not Siberia. Still, some on the lower end of the production scale dreamed of finer things.

That included former X-FILES P.A. Lance Peverley, who found inspiration in a script he had written while at the Vancouver Film School. "I'd always been intrigued by the Don Quixote character," said Peverley. "I'd seen MAN OF LA MANCHA when I was in high school, things like that. But it wasn't until I was working on THE X-FILES as a production assistant that the character really took hold. I did a major re-write on the script, imagining [Lone Gunman] Tom Braidwood playing the Sancho Panza character. I was working the downtown, east side of Vancouver—my job was basically sweeping up cigarette butts, holding traffic; I was right at the bottom of the list as far as THE X-FILES hierarchy was concerned. But I spent a lot of time in the streets, coming across the locals, some of the homeless, some of the psychiatric patients that had been released. The story just became much more real to me. Once I pictured Tom Braidwood as my lead character, it all came together very nicely. It's a comedy, but based on a lot of reality."

The resulting script, TILT,

The Vancouver crew found some spare time on their hands.



THE X-FILES Emmy-winning sound mixer Michael Williamson goes over script revisions on location with Frohike's Tom Braidwood during the filming of TILT.

told the story of a down-at-the-heels salesman named Sam Penzer, who comes to the aid of a derelict and finds himself immersed in the man's delusions of knights and noble quests. With this polished scenario in hand, Peverley joined forces with former X-FILES trainee, assistant director Patrick Stark, who took on the role of producer, and art department driver Barry Shelton, who became executive producer. Together, they dared to approach the man who had started out as THE X-FILES assistant director but had significantly raised his public profile with his portrayal of the Scully-obsessed Lone Gunman Frohike. "Patrick Stark called me and said that he and a friend

were doing a little film and would I like to be involved and do some acting?" remembered Tom Braidwood. "I said, 'Okay, sounds good.' I can't remember what I was doing at the time, I was a little busy. I probably didn't think about it much until I got the script and realized I was the star."

Producer Patrick Stark remembers that minor oversight. "He had some time to think about it. It wasn't until months later that we actually sat down and went over the script, had a cast read-through, that kind of thing. He liked the script and liked the thought of the other people involved with it. We had [X-FILES alumni] Michael Williamson as the sound mixer

and Marty McInally as the director of photography, so at least we'd make everything look good and sound good. It wouldn't be a student film."

With a pro crew and a prospective, 35 minute running time, all the TILT partners had to do was find the time to make the thing. Weekends, they decided, would do. The production schedule would be significantly telescoped, but not without some significant advantages. "Because we've shot it over the period of a year," said Stark, "as we moved along it sort of gained momentum with the number of people becoming involved, the people wanting to help. Things we never thought we'd have—like motion-control for visual effects, and crane shots—sort of came after the fact. People would offer us these services and we'd go, 'Well, how can we apply this to the film?' and went from there.

"We always knew we wanted to shoot on 35 [mm film]. I've been collecting 35mm film in my fridge for a long time. Little short-ends, you know, ends of the roll that were donated to me. I got a second fridge to put the short-ends in—there was no question that we were going to shoot 35 when it came to making the film. I wanted to get that stuff out of my fridge."

Said Peverley, "Ninety-nine percent of the movie takes place in one night, so continuity was one of those things where I had to go, 'Okay, months have passed, hair lengths have changed, characters that were being developed in one scene we're now trying to approach with the same mood.' It hasn't been extremely easy, but at the same time we've got some of the best [crewmembers] in the business. Patrick and I were basically the most junior people on the set,



The Lone Gunman stretches his acting chops, playing Sancho Panza to John R. Taylor's Quixote in a modern-day adaptation of Cervantes' fantasy classic.

even though we were producer and director. Somebody like Tom comes in, and even when it's six months later, it's still like it's ten seconds later in time as far as the story is concerned. I'm shocked when I look at the dailies and he's walking the same way, his expressions are the same. There's no [conscious] skill that could achieve this—we're just doing very well with continuity.

"The other side of this is that I'm figuring that if the audience notices that the hair of the guy in the back of the room has grown a quarter of an inch, I guess I sort of lost them anyway."

Viewers may not be lost to TILT's extended shooting schedule, but that didn't mean more tangible aspects of the production were immune from the

strictures of time. Key amongst them: a building which figured prominently in the film's climax. Said Stark, "There's a landmark in Vancouver, a very old building—old for Vancouver, which is like 100 years—that we had for our 'windmill.' It's an old building with a nice, green copper dome to it that we played a lot in the back of our shots, leading up to this big day that we have yet to shoot. We had approval for the location, everything seemed to be fine, but it took us longer to shoot the film than we expected. So at the time we were ready to shoot at that location, they said, 'Oh, we're sorry, we've leased out offices in the building, and they don't want anything to do with the filming.'

"So what are we going to

"I've been collecting 35mm film in my fridge," said producer Stark. "There was no question that we were going to shoot 35. I wanted to get that stuff out of my fridge."

do? We've played this particular landmark in the background of many shots, it's the building that we wanted to play as the windmill—in other people's minds, they could see how a crazy person could see that it's a dragon. But we lost the location; we had to improvise. We went to a sugar refinery where there are huge silos. We decided to play the silos as the dragons. It's not quite as easy a sell: we're going to have to use a visual effect, a very subtle visual effect, to show the insane, Don Quixote character's POV. But it all turned out for the best. In the location that we wanted originally, we'd have to have a police lock-up, a pedestrian lock-up. It's right in the middle of Vancouver, it's right on the edge of the east end, which is a very impoverished, very sensitive area. We've moved it to an industrial area where we can shoot all night long, where we don't need any lock-up. It's actually made everything much easier, so there you go."

That last, major sequence was scheduled to shoot in May. Deciding to go for broke, all involved prepped for a sequence the likes of which rarely finds its way into a "weekend project" type of film. "It's huge," said Stark of the finale. "We've got 60 extras at the base of the silo at the sugar refinery. We've got a stunt guy on top of one of the silos, about 150 feet. And we've got a helicopter with a camera mounted on it doing a crazy shot around him—we're actually bringing in a first assistant director for that, a really experienced one; we definitely don't want to be responsible for that. Safety's a main issue, we don't want to do anything nuts for the sake of a shot. We've got a parade coordinator; we've got Jacob Rupp, who does a lot of the major stunt work in Vancouver. David

Duchovny's stunt double from Vancouver's X-FILES is also a coordinator. They're all making it a safe shoot, but also selling the shot so that it looks good."

Said Peverley, "This was the day that was never planned for in the writing stage, when I was writing the quick-and-dirty, scenes-that-we-could-shoot-cheap script. Patrick said to me, 'By the way, if we were to get a helicopter, could you use it?' I was actually stunned, 'Y-you know...sure, if that were to happen...' He phoned back an hour later and said, 'We've got a helicopter.' We've got the helicopter, we've got a Wescam, which is a rock-steady camera mount. [Stark] said, 'Of course, it's going to be the scene on the tower?' I said, 'You betcha.' When the guy's on the top of the tower, if we can see him from an aerial viewpoint, with the camera going out into the night...wow!

"That's the stuff for us," Peverley summed up. "That's what this film's turned into." □

Braidwood as Sam Penzer, Cervantes X-FILES style, filmed on Vancouver locations when the show went to LA.



Executive producer Barry Shelton, producer and 1st assistant director Patrick Stark and writer/director Lance Peverley (r), FILES alums making a short film.

