

Phile Under Phenomenon

The mysterious secret behind *The X-Files*?
Hard work.

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FBI AGENTS ARE STOCK HOLLYWOOD CHARACTERS. They've been the good guys, the bad guys, the fall guys and more. But Friday nights on the Fox network, two FBI agents live life a bit differently — they track down mysterious UFOs, deadly poltergeists and mutant liver-eating serial killers.

It's *The X-Files*, of course, and although it's a far cry from standard TV fare (or perhaps because it is), this show is hitting a nerve out there. In much the same way "Trekkies" created a culture out of their love for *Star Trek*, "X-Philes" are carving out their own niche as they form online fan clubs, buy up novels and comics based on the series and come together by the thousands at *X-Files* conventions. Just what is going on here?

Gillian Anderson as
Scully: grounded,
skeptical, sexy.



"Mulder thinks about UFOs the way other men think about sex."

DAVID DUCHOVNY, A.K.A.
SPECIAL AGENT MULDER

Suspended disbelief

"We're exploring the areas of extreme possibilities," says Paul Rabwin, one of the show's producers. "The subject matter is supernatural, but it's in a grounded area. The science and technology on the show is real. People realize that genetic mutations, for example, can and do happen. It's a small step from there to the plots we've presented."

It's the shadow realms that *The X-Files* specializes in. Special Agents Dana Scully and Fox Mulder don't just come across ghosts, demons and aliens — they come across as real people.

"Mulder thinks about UFOs the way other men think about sex," says David Duchovny, who plays the driven, troubled Mulder. "That's the challenge for me — to bring that kind of intensity to the part."

Duchovny has gotten into story and plot development because he believes the show will benefit from revealing more of who the characters are. In this way, the show can achieve a balance between the "real" world of humans and emotions and the paranormal world with which they deal constantly.

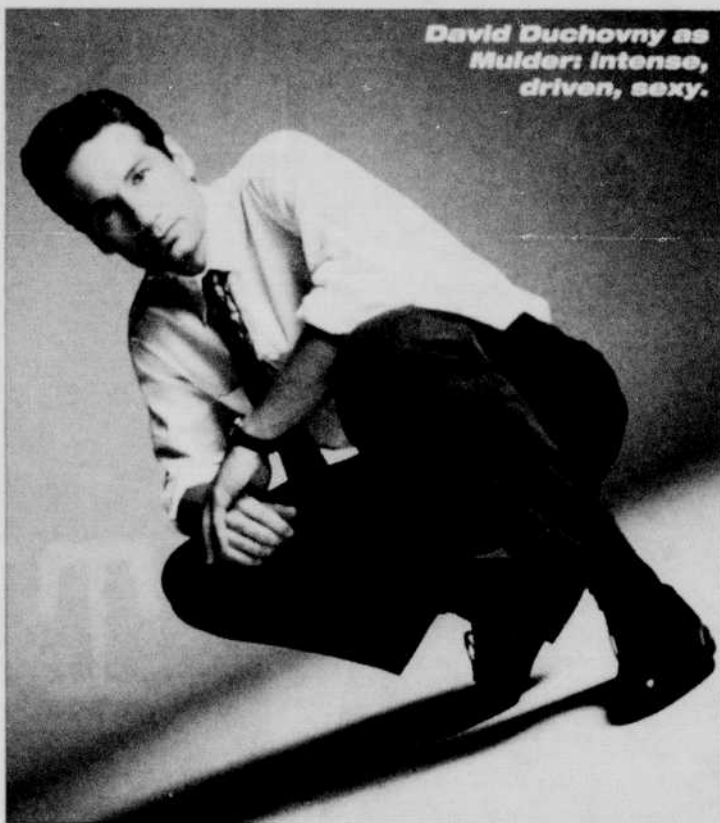
"People are familiar with FBI agents, what they do," Rabwin says. "I think what draws people in and keeps them there is that here are two people in a mundane environment, but they deal with supernatural events. And one of them is always speaking for all of us, because one character is a believer and one comes from a more scientific, skeptical background."

The never-ending story

The show sustains much of its credibility by grounding the stories with solid narrative techniques, Rabwin says. Behind all the special effects and conspiracies, the art of storytelling remains.

"People love mysteries... and well-told stories," says Gillian Anderson, a.k.a. Special Agent Dana Scully, as she takes a breather outside the set in Vancouver, British

David Duchovny as
Mulder: intense,
driven, sexy.



Columbia, where the show is filmed. Scully is the skeptic — week after week, she analyzes the particulars of the case and tries to find a rational explanation.

"People want to talk about these topics, and we provide them that chance," Anderson says. "And on this show, which is different from most episodic series, people don't know what to expect next. We have few sequels, and those that we do have are so high-pitched that people are desperate to find out what's going to happen."

This isn't the sort of thinking that goes into many television shows these days. The level of commitment both on and off the set is a big part of the reason *The X-Files* has become the sensation it is.

"Everything about this show is high-quality," Anderson says. "The writing, the editing, the directing, the quality of the co-stars. We've got people busting their balls to take risks and make this show good."

Episode director Kim Manners agrees. "I've been in this business for 17 years, and this is the best I could ask for. We have the best equipment and the best people."

"Chris [Carter, creator and producer] hands me a script and says, 'Make a feature.' I've worked on shows where they actually got upset if you did good film work. All they wanted were the basics and for me to hurry up and get a

close-up of the star. Here, I'm not only given permission, I'm given free rein, and I'm expected to produce high-quality work."

Finest worksong

Behind the scenes, the effort continues. Everyone is friendly and cooperative, but there's no question that they're on the job. The set hums. Most of these people have worked together before, but whether they have or not, the impression is that of a working ensemble.

"When you can get on a show like this, it's a blast," says Nick Lea, who plays the evil counter-agent Krycek. "Care goes into every aspect. Inevitably, that care is reflected in the ratings."

Critics are picking up on the quality as well. Last season, *The X-Files* was a dark-horse winner at the Golden Globe awards for Best Drama. This year the show was nominated for seven Emmys, including Best Drama, Best Writing and Best Cinematography.

The heat is on. The success of the show may seem supernatural, but the formula is classic: Work hard — the rest will follow.

For *The X-Files*, the proof is out there.

Audette Fulbright went all the way from North Carolina to Vancouver, British Columbia, to interview her fave TV stars.