

TEEN'S and TWENTIES

TV's Most Popular Sci-Fi and X Marks the Spot

by Shazaad Ahmed

FOR the few who strain to look beyond the final result and into the integration of the wide range of cinematic elements behind it, a bit of inconsistency is bound to step in when you are quick to place the X-FILES on the science fiction category. After all, with its painful realism meticulously scripted alongside the extra terrestrial subject matters, the show does seem bent on blurring the line that separates fiction from reality. But the fact that the show has consistently eluded easy categorization is probably the reason behind the momentum that has propelled it into its own distinctive stature.

First of all, it is a far cry from the more obvious science fiction format which departs entirely from within the realm of reality with the notion of entertainment locked into the core of its fabric as its primary, if not sole purpose. However, shifting back to the subject of inconsistencies, some shows that have adopted this format (STAR TREK in particular) have managed to cross over the boundaries of the entertainment industry, investigating a series of social and cultural repercussions through the individual interpretations of a mass audience.

Secondly, it is far superior in terms of production value and the over all general approach (not to mention popularity) than other shows of a similar nature. The Paranormal Borderline hosted by Jonathan Frakes is a respectable effort with hard-core investigations into alien sightings and abductions, paranormal activities, UFO related government conspiracies and (supposedly) actual footage of an alien autopsy.

But with its nagging appearance each week, one can hardly ignore the case of THE EXTRAORDINARY, with Corbin Bernsen's lame attempts to make believers out of us with the accompaniment of a cigar, no doubt written in to lend some badly needed air of intelligence, and bogus re-enact-

ments and empty dialogues that reaches the saturation point at the conclusion of each show with the line (or rather the warning), "And I'll see you..... in the future." With a budget that seems fit to finance a motion picture, a fiction with an approach few others have explored or successfully channelled to the viewing public; synchronizing and balancing a convincing combination between the natural and the bizarre. Stories about computer science and artificial in-



TV's favourite FBI agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully in 'The X-Files'

telligence, nuclear pollution and mutation, cannibalism and immortality, reincarnation and telekinetic abilities, psychosis and subliminal messages, government cover-ups and alien contact. It's science fiction alright, but science fiction overpowered and adulter-

ated by a heavy dose of realism and intelligence, as opposed to the free-spirited imaginations of other Science Fiction creators, enabling viewers to relate, if not entirely succumb to it.

Ironically actor David Duchovny turned down the role of Fox Mulder several times, hating that his short but versatile list of movie credits (including roles as a telephone hustler, a transvestite FBI agent and the hesitant accomplice to a psychotic killer) would enable him to embark on a major film career. Even after the show has evolved into a critical acclaim, Emmy-nominated, Golden Globe-winning television series, Duchovny maintains a sort of unenthusiastic nonchalance towards all the hype. For example, in a brief interview last October with Laura Connelly for GQ magazine, four out of four of his quotes painted the picture of a disgruntled actor. On his involvement with the show, "It has done great things for my career. But it's hard to have a life." On his role, "It's horrible for an actor to be playing the same role for five, made ten years," and concerning his rise to fame, "I could just as well be unemployed and disgruntled than employed and disgruntled."

And finally, his own personal views on extra terrestrialism: "I'm not out there to have a supernatural experience. I'd be the last guy."

But Duchovny's indifference has done little, if anything to cripple the show's meteoric rise to cult status. With the publication and sell out of X-FILES books, the release of a sound track album, official conventions, talk of an X-FILES movie and the shows constant genesis itself, this is one television series that has secured a place for itself in the Sci-Fi Hall of Fame.

An ad for the show appearing on several 20th Century Fox video tapes ends with the line "EXPOSURE MEANS ADDICTION." Well that's one advertising pitch that couldn't be closer to the truth.

HERE is no place as interesting as a classroom. It has in it all the ingredients of a very 'masala' (Spicy) wrapped soap-opera. The characters seen in classrooms have all the necessary ingredients to be stars on their own. The best thing is that we are all so familiar with them all.

There is first the teachers-pret in the class. He never forgets to do his homework or

CLASSROOM CVS !!

by Muneera Parbeen

cover his copies with brown paper and always remembers when there is going to be test on that day. He actually means no harm but is very often the most disliked (and unpopular) person in the class. The

teacher asks him to make the list of all the talkative and "fakebrav" students in the class or to remind him to give the class extra "homework" over the holidays. No one likes the teachers pet.

the teacher (who of course, never admits it). His sole purpose is to entertain the class especially when the teacher is serious. He is so restlessly naughty and yet so adorably cute that he manages to get away with it all. He too spends quite sometime of his school life in detention (or standing on the bench) but he takes all this in good humour. A day without him is dull, and his presence keeps a class in balance — like a base neutralising the acid effects!

Of course, no-class is really complete without the "GENIUS". This is a no-harm meaning, often innocent guy/gal who is blessed with a higher IQ than the rest. He asks the most complicated questions during a lesson (Often backsetting un-prepared teachers) and completes the sum that the Math teacher gets stuck in. The teachers always pamper him (to encourage him) and most students, don't like him much. The Genius is usually a friendless soul, with little interest in anything other than the next years books. Except ofcourse just before our exam — at this time he is seen bee-chased by summer friends...

One cannot complete a class without the "Bodhai" or Miss/Mr — all-foolish character. This is a measurable person usually not very smart in appearance either. He is the one who ALWAYS forgets to bring his books or do his homework and he is a delightful scapegoat for the activities of the rest. He quickly takes in all the blame from teacher (who delight in picking on him) at every chance and students (who indulge in his activities to distract the teachers). He invariably comes late every morning and his day starts with a stern lecture — which becomes the chief factor of his school life.

A classroom is a mighty interesting place and classroom politics even more. The different characters in such a place delight us as we are all so familiar with them. We live through it as students and then as parents (or teachers) again see if being repeated in the next generation. From the kindergarten to the more senior levels, we all can happily say — "there is no place like a CLASSROOM".

Next in line is the classroom hero (Otherwise known as the Z ...) who prides in being the tough guy/gal. He often dares the teachers and spends a large part of his school life in detention or at the principal's office. However both the students as well as the teachers (at times!) try to stay away from him to avoid all unnecessary "jhoot jhamda".

Then there is the class "ate!" — a proud little Miss or Mr know-it-all. He never ceases to show off his knowledge and is an extremely busy body to make trouble for the rest. He insists on a test when no one else is prepared for it and definitely cannot come in for an extra class when the others need one! making the others cancel the date and arrange another to accommodate him. He is possibly the least liked person in a classroom and the least popular too. But this hardly ever bothers him for his superiority-complex (or over-confidence) always keeps him floating on the air, away from the others and reality.

The best loved & popular character in a class is ofcourse the class comic. He is liked both by the students as well as

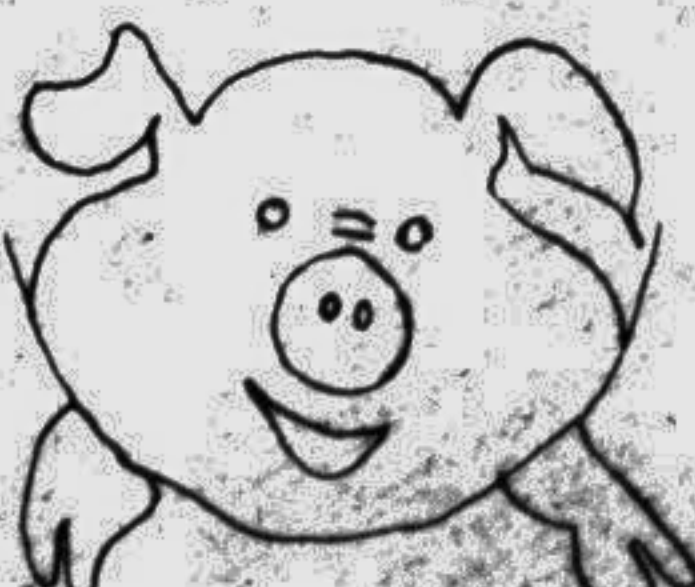


SHARIER '96

Regrets

by Akhand Riyadh Murshed
Class IX, Age-15

DUSK came when daylight waned, thinking about what have I lost or gained. With hungry eyes the horror stands, and I think not all that I can. I fear of dark, death and lust of life, my mind and soul are at a strife. I try not to think what life has meant, for what have I given it that it has cent. The Dark I fear for what have I alone? Many a questions my heart begs, my heart answers none. With bleady eyes and pale face, the horizon comes nearer, I shall be deceased of life, I think, all wrong and undone. I wish I have accomplished for all, that I have not done. Time runs out and the dark clouds, move over me. An unhappy end to my mortal self I see, That I shall be leaving a story, unfinished of light that was before diminished.....!



THE quiz master shall never venture to inquire. "Who had recorded the greatest name in the field of escapades? He performed for the last time, in 1926." Anyone, with the minimal exposure to the feats of unusual prowess in the field, shall immediately pop up with the answer, Harry Houdini.

Houdini made himself a legend with his public performances. Nothing could hold him back. Many people believed he was using sheer black magic to escape from the stage of performance. When he publicly displayed his skill, people were stunned. However, when they could not find out how he managed the incredible acts, they inferred he was indulging in tricks. Yet, there was nothing tricky about them. On the contrary, every escape he managed came about because of his mental alertness, ability to prepare the ground for the escape, and skill in identifying possible weakness in the system which tied him down.

Even today, the tricks he exploited to wriggle out of impossible bonds are unknown. But, he had left his imprint on the sands of time. Before massive audience, he cut his way out from boxes into which he had been crated, nails and ropes tightly holding the human content. He had jumped from bridges, while handcuffed, into the foaming seething waters below, to emerge unscathed. And on one occasion, he called the bluff of a Birmingham fabricator who came up with what he described as the strongest pair of handcuffs ever made. The manacle had six sets of locks and nine tumblers in each cuff. The handcuffs closed in on Houdini's wrists, even as the 4000-odd crowd, congregated at the London Hippodrome, watched with bated breath. Houdini told the crowd, "Ladies and gentlemen! I am now locked up in a handcuff that has taken a British mechanic five years to make. I do not know whether I am going to get out of it or not, but I can assure you, I am going to do my best." He did just that. He emerged, after a fairly long struggle; his hands were free. They held the padlocks above his head; Thunderous ovation filled the hall. The legend had established himself, for sure, on that day of 1904.

Since then, he had turned out several stunts. He became irretrievably established in public memory as the greatest practitioner of the art of escapade, of all times. The tragedy is that the secret of the man died mostly with him. However, on one instance, he did let out how he managed to escape.

It began in the spring of 1913. Houdini was sipping wine with soda when his attendant brought a letter which reached by the day's post. The attendant laid the letter on the side table, as instructed by him and retreated. He took his own time to savour the drink. Finally, after draining out the last drop of it, Houdini put the glass away. He reached out for the letter. He read the address, "Mr Harry Houdini, The Birmingham Empire."

A funny thought struck him. How apt was the address on the letter! Was he not the emperor of escapades! So he had a right to call his residence Birmingham Empire. A slight danced on his lips, for a fleeting second. Houdini gently tore the envelope, carefully working along the border. He now had a slit wide enough for him to reach for the letter. He inserted his fingers and deftly pulled out the letter. His eyes riveted on the contents. It read, "Dear Sir, when you were previously in Birmingham, you escaped from a packing case. As the case was delivered, two days ahead, you had ample time to tamper with it."

The great magician Houdini's secrets

Unpacked

"Absurd!" Houdini mumbled to himself, before he continued to take in the rest of the letter. "In order to eliminate such a possibility, will you accept the challenge, permitting me to bring to the EMPIRE timbers, battens, 2 1/2 inch nails and, in full view of the audience, construct a strong, heavy box, you to enter immediately, to nail down the lid, securely rope up the box and defy you to escape without demolishing the same."

It was signed by Clayton Hutton and some other employees of the timber firm

anyone who could produce a box which would hold him down and won't let him get out on his own. Hutton dreamt of the hundred pounds he would claim from Houdini. For, Hutton was quite sure that the box he would fabricate would be strong enough to deny Houdini any means of escape.

Houdini talked at length with Hutton. Hutton reiterated how the box would be fabricated in the presence of the crowd. He defined the length of the nails, the thickness of the planks, the gauge and length of the rope that shall go

favour. He replied, "Why not? You are welcome."

A few days later, Houdini visited the timber mill. He received a warm welcome. Many of the workers crowded around him. They were keen to have a glimpse of their master. Clayton Hutton accompanied him, during the first round. When Houdini expressed a desire to stand and watch the workers at their job, Clayton left him to himself. Houdini started talking with the carpenters.

He soon identified the carpenter who would nail the box, after he had got in. That was a tip which he needed. He started talking to the man. How long had he been at his job? Did he enjoy his work? Did he earn enough by pursuing his profession?

The carpenter grinned, happily, when the renowned escape artist spent so much time talking to him. The man soon became an ardent fan of the artist. He listened avidly to the details of his earlier feats, listed by Houdini.

Before leaving, he gently picked up the carpenter by his hands and said, "My dear man, why don't you come over, when you have spare time, to my little hole.... I mean Birmingham Empire. I love to talk to people who earn their living by the sweat of their brow. And may be we sit, talk at leisure over drinks."

The date and time for the visit by the carpenter was duly settled.

None were aware about what transpired at the meeting between Houdini and the carpenter, for a pretty long time. The truth came out after the lapse of many years.

Houdini had won the complete confidence of the carpenter. So, when the man had taken enough of Houdini's hospitality, the master laid down an offer which the carpenter could hardly refuse. Houdini described how nails could be driven in, before the public, to make it appear that they were being strongly getting embedded in the timber, yet if the carpenter knew how to go about it, he could nail the box in such a way that when the slightest pressure with the feet was applied from within, the end-piece would turn on the two genuine nails.

It took the carpenter some time to see what Houdini had in mind. Houdini gave him a demonstration on how to wield the hammer and the nails to create illusions of strength where none existed. Then came the knowledge that Houdini was seeking his help. Houdini wanted him to play along for a consideration, which was substantial. Houdini promised the man three pounds. This was a princely sum in 1913. A sum which the carpenter could not refuse easily. He thought about it and found nothing wrong in being an accomplice of the master. The three pounds, dangled before him as compensation, too worked miracles with his attitude. For that princely sum, the carpenter was willing to go along with Houdini's plans.

Houdini told the carpenter that he would keep the little secret unto himself. Not a word should escape him. The carpenter nodded his head. And off he went, three pounds jangling in his pocket. This was only half the battle won. Houdini had been told by Hutton that he would be stacked in a sack, bound down with ropes, before he would be crated in the box. This stipulation did not nag Houdini. For he had a confident turn up at the venue of the grand act. He told the confident that he should be the last to shake hands with him, before he got ready to be stacked away in the sack and pickled in the crate.

(To be continued)

Courtesy: World Famous Escapades



Harry Houdini

which was owned by Hutton's uncle.

Houdini read the letter again.

Here was a challenge which he decided to accept. He could not turn it down without seriously undermining his prestige. That was a thought he could not brook. He had come a long way to establish his reputation. He would not let his prestige be devalued by shying away from the challenge.

He contacted Clayton Hutton and told him he was ready to accept the challenge. Hutton was delighted. He had read the statement made by Houdini, some time back, offering a hundred pounds to

round Houdini did not show the slightest indication of any difference. He smiled, when Hutton completed the listing of the whole process of packing the great escape artist in a sack and then in a crate. There was no objection to the procedure, detailed by Hutton, from Houdini.

"So, we agree," Hutton held his hand out, as he took leave of the artist.

Houdini smiled, shook hands, while putting in a request. Would Hutton let him visit the timber mill which the former's uncle owned? Hutton saw nothing wrong in the request. He assumed that he could not deny Houdini this



Houdini in the casket

ANOTHER SHORT ETERNAL STORY

Md Atiquzzaman

THE story is short chiefly because the incidents occurred within a short period, say..... twelve hours.

As well that, She likes both of them. She knows as well that she has to make a decision, a wise serious decision. To make the situation a bit more complex, here she is, along with a few juveniles, and of course, along with those two men — they are all on a picnic. A word or two with the one of the two young men, and he gives away in the early hours of the day... its an emotional explosion. She is that irresistible, that face, sophisticated, frequent use of provokingly affectionate words, she is all that. Do you have any idea. What an average (Hindi movie addicted) guy's dream lover looks like? Then you must have already painted my saintly sorceress.

Though her response to his emotional explosion was questionably earlier, he listened eagerly. Expressions on his face changed fast as she said, "Do you boys have to take it so easy! No doubt about your devotion, but still I'm afraid you never considered how you would present my divorced

mother. And you must have not considered your parent's dreams regarding your career as well. Then....."

He shrank and he froze more & more with each word she uttered. His parents have

in fact a neat plan regarding their beloved son's future, a rather expensive and brilliant plan which includes a gala wedding.

Fortunately, neither of the two young people had any

confusion between love and ego. So, the minutes until the young man left, the two were sincerely discussing the... weather.

The second boy appeared in the evening. Incidents progressed in an identically similar manner, that is, from his emotional explosion till her story — telling.

Now, this man responded in an astonishingly amiable attitude. He said, look, as far as our emotion is concerned, the rest of the problems are no problems at all! Come take my hand and I'll always be beside you. These were a few of his lovely warm words which lured her to share the dream.

The picnic took place two years back. The first boy I mentioned, now lives a happy, content life... a happy family, two children... etc. The second boy is now probably on a different picnic, helping some other girl to dream even sweeter dreams. He faintly remembers my heroine. And about my heroine... well, I haven't heard of her lately.



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