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The X-Files for Dummies

The truth is out there and we make it a little easier to decipher with our paranormal primer.



by Emily Soares

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Few television shows have had as illustrious and intricate a history as *The X-Files*. For aficionados, the intertwining story arcs and rich show mythology keep them coming back season after season. But others, having missed the beginning, wonder if they can ever catch up and figure out what in the blue blazes (and other unidentified lights) is going on. Those of you who fall into the first category already have personal Web sites devoted to the series, fave episode polls, fan fiction, *X-Files* underwear and every episode on DVD. You don't need my help. But for the rest of you who may have tuned in and out over the years, or never tuned in at all, here is a brief and I hope helpful Cliffs Notes version of the series -- a snapshot of characters and story arcs we like to call "X-Files for Dummies."

First, the characters:

Special Agent Fox Mulder: An agent with a background in profiling and violent crime, Mulder stumbles upon the X-Files; orphaned and unsolvable FBI cases with a paranormal undertow; early in his bureau career and can't let them go. He has personal involvement in these cases as his sister was abducted (more on this later) when Fox was a boy and the files start to reveal mysterious truths that pertain to his own life. His obsession with bizarre, messy cases that always skim too close to revealing secrets that the TPTB (The Powers That Be, aka the Syndicate) would rather keep hidden make him A#1 thorn in the FBI's and the Syndicate's backside.

Special Agent Dana Scully: Scully is the scientist of the pair. She went to med school, interned in



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forensic pathology and was recruited by the FBI. After gaining notice by her superiors, she was assigned as Mulder's partner with the hope that her scientific skepticism would debunk Mulder's work and that she could act as a kind of spy. The bet couldn't have been more wrong, or was it part of another master plan? Scully and Mulder prove to be an explosive combination, and the longer they work together, the more Scully is willing to put scientific certainty on the back burner and Mulder is willing to rely on her reasoned approach to the impossible. But Scully has paid a real price for her X-Files work. Not only has she been painted with the same "spooky" brush as Mulder by the bureau (derailing what had been a promising career), but her sister was killed in a botched attempt on Scully's life and she was herself abducted for the Syndicate/alien project (more below).

Special Agent John Doggett: At the beginning of Season 8, after Mulder is abducted by aliens, Doggett is brought in to try and find him and act as Scully's new partner. Despite or perhaps because of his penchant for logic, Doggett, a former Marine and NYPD officer, finds himself hooked on the X-Files and reluctant to leave even when offered a promotion. The mysterious murder of his son Luke, years earlier, is another unknown that links him to the weirdness of his new assignment. As the search for Mulder intensifies, Doggett enlists the help of an old friend and associate...

Special Agent Monica Reyes: With degrees in folklore and mythology, Reyes studied at Quantico and had her first FBI assignment in New York, where she worked on the case of Doggett's missing son. She transferred to the X-Files at Doggett's request.

AD Walter Skinner: Somewhat enigmatic, Skinner initially seemed like just another one of the top brass who wants to shut down the X-Files. But as it turns out, he is actually interested in helping Mulder and Scully, though within a very strict framework. His concern for the agents has increased over the years and he has shielded them both from agency censure and the weird danger posed by...

The Cigarette-Smoking Man (CSM): We never really know who this character is but he seems to be the pallid complexion behind nearly every X-File (with the exception of the stand-alone "monster-of-the-week" episodes). As the series progresses, he plays an increasingly important role in the conspiracy arcs and is a key player in the...

TPTB, aka the Syndicate or the Consortium: This group, a character in its own right, is murky to say the least and ever-evolving. Sometimes they appear to be within the government, sometimes without; a renegade group of unspecified interest that often involves testing of humans and/or aliens and always, but always, will stop at nothing to keep these various projects secret. They meet in dimly lit, smoky rooms where they puff on cigars and give the CSM orders.

The Lone Gunmen: For a short, sweet time the subject of their very own spin-off series, these three nuts are conspiracy buffs and hackers who perform impossible feats of researching brilliance for Mulder and Scully and later on for Doggett. They are even more paranoid than Mulder and make him look like a regular guy by comparison.

Some of the conspiracy arcs of the series require flowcharts to do them justice, but let's take a stab at the central one:

Colonization: The basic premise here is that alien colonists gave rise to all of us, then came back and decided to take over. The Syndicate, we eventually learn, has long been working with the aliens on genetic testing to create alien/human hybrids. They first tried spreading an alien virus in smallpox and then used bees. Other forms of the disease include black oil (actually alien blood) and little worms that enter and co-opt their victims. The Syndicate's motivations are unclear but they appear to strike various deals with the aliens to preserve their own power. There is, however, split opinion even within TPTB, of which Mulder's father was once a member. He is assassinated for revealing some of these secrets to his son. Samantha, Mulder's sister, was abducted as part of a deal with the aliens in which one person from each Syndicate member's family was taken in exchange for an alien fetus that would provide the alien genome with which to create an alien/human hybrid, a Syndicate goal. Whew! Still with me? There's more...

At some point, another race of aliens who are opposed to colonization gets involved. These aliens are able to shape-shift and assume any identity. In some instances, they act as bounty hunters to eliminate the alien/hybrids, which provide the gateway to colonization. They work against both the colonists and the Syndicate.

Through its impressive nine-season run *The X-Files* has captivated and mystified millions of viewers and continues to do so. And though the series is no longer in production, the imaginations behind its stories live on. Who knows what the series' creators might come up with next? This is only a brief rundown of one of the densest mythologies in TV history. For further detail, please visit the official *X-Files* site: <http://www.xfiles.com/> and the slew of great fan sites out there.

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