#### Threads of the Mythology Black Oil

Chris Carter:

I think season three, you can look at that and say almost across the board that it was a completely entertaining and quality season, and a lot of that had to do with how hard that Frank Spotnitz worked on the show, how hard Howard Gordon worked on the show, that we had Darin Morgan on the show and he added just a flavour to the show that showed the range of not just the kinds of stories you could tell but of the actors and how good they were. It was a show that was growing and at that point had kind of realized what it could be and even though it could become even more, I think at that point it had become a complete show. And that's why I think season three is for me the best season of all.

##### Time Line August 1945 – Black Oil Strikes U.S. Sub A B29 transporting a nuclear bomb and an escort squadron of P51 Mustangs crash in the ocean after an encounter with a UFO. A U.S. sub is dispatched to locate the planes.

[The submarine. A flashback to World War II.]

John Shiban:

The black oil was an alien creature that invaded your body through your eyes or your nose or your mouth, and would take over your self and control you, and then when it was done with you it would move on.

Howard Gordon:

The trick was always to find these graphic representations of possession, being possessed, being abducted, of being not who you are.

[Scientist drilling into the rock and getting splattered by the black oil.]

John Shiban:

Later in the series we discover that it's in primitive fossils, it's also found in meteorites that have been found on Earth.

##### Time Line 35,000 B.C. – Black Oil Strikes During the last ice age, two human hunters are attacked by an alien and one is infected with the black oil virus.

[Primitive man in the cave, seeing the oil. The oil creeps up his body.]

David Gauthier  
Effects Supervisor

The oil in the eyes, well obviously we couldn't do it for real so we had to come up with some kind of composite shot that – Mat Beck at the time was doing the visual effects – so that Mat could lay into people's, over people's eyes.

Mat Beck  
Special Effects Supervisor

We put them digitally on the surface of the cornea and we actually move them in such a way that – you know the sense you get with floaters in your eye, how they kind of move this way and they stop and they kind of drift back the other way - we actually made the oil goop move that way, so when he or she blinked it would follow the blink and then keep going, you know, with a lag in it as if it's really a liquid, it's really a fluid.

David Gauthier:

We went through, oh, hundreds of tests trying to find the two types of fluids that we could put together and Mat could then overlay over people's eyes. And I remember us coming up with a black oil mixed in with acetone, I believe, that give it the best globular look and we got to float by the lens several hundred times until Mat thought that he had had enough of it (laughs) and then he took it away and lo and behold the next time I saw it, it was over the top of somebody's eyes on the show.

John Shiban:

As the mythology grew, the oil grew with it. The oil then, if it stays in you, it can gestate into the alien from the movie. And then the alien from the movie can then become a gray. The conspirators, the Elders, basically tried to develop a vaccine to stop it, some of them did, so did the Russians in 'Tunguska' and 'Terma', they were working on their own vaccine to try to stop this invasive oil. The faceless aliens - the reason why they made themselves faceless was to prevent this from getting in to their bodies, so the faceless aliens which are the bounty hunters basically, the idea being that this black oil is spreading around the universe subjugating races of aliens including us, including human beings, and eventually going to rule the universe.

##### Time Line October 1995 – Piper Maru When a French salvage ship sends a diving crew to recover a mysterious wreckage from World War II, the crew falls prey to a bizarre illness and Agents Mulder and Scully join the investigation.

[A diver finds the wreckage.]

Frank Spotnitz:

There was a two-parter called 'Piper Maru' and 'Apocrypha' which, I had gone to a convention in Minneapolis, an X-Files Convention, and a fan had asked about the effect that Scully's sister's death was having on her. And it occurred to me that we had not dealt with that. And so literally on the plane ride back I came up with almost the entire story by the time the plane landed in Los Angeles, which was probably the fastest anything ever happened for me on that show. That was sort of the demands of the characters, dealing with the emotional baggage that the character was carrying around.

Rob Maier  
Construction Coordinator

A dive team is down looking for a specific P51 Mustang and they are scanning across the fuselage of the plane and then they read the serial number on the plane and then they go up to the cockpit and then the pilot jumps out and he's against the glass.

[The pilot bangs on the glass.]

Rob Maier:

And that was me. I asked Rob [Bowman]: 'hey, can I do that stunt, I think I could do that, it sounds really cool.' And he says, 'well, I don't know. We'll have to talk to Chris.' So, he talked to Chris and Chris said yeah, and they both came out to the [unintelligible] every day and said, 'You know, you're going to have to cut your hair.' Back then I had quite long hair, and I said, 'That's OK. I don't care. I'll do it.'

David Gauthier:

For me, that all sort of came together because I don't know how many hours we spent together, either agreeing, disagreeing, or blowing things up. As he built it, I would burn it down or blow it up, so we spent many hours together putting whatever Chris wanted together, so it was nice to see him on screen with the black oil in his eyes, it sort of completed the whole thing for me.

John Shiban:

My favourite black oil moment still, even after years of black oil, is in 'Piper Maru' when Krycek goes into the men's room at the airport, looks down, sees a pair of women's shoes and looks up and there's Mrs., I believe her name is Mrs. Gauthier, who has been taken over by the oil. The oil leaves her and goes into him, but it's just a great scene and Nick Lea was terrific in that.

Rob Bowman:

So Krycek walks out. It was written, 'as they walk out of frame' or something, and it was kind of hard because it just exists in the eyes, the oil, this little place where we've shown that it's visible. And I remember calling down to Chris or Frank and saying, 'I think I need to shoot this differently. What I'd like to do is, I'd like to have the last image of the episode be one that I think is good but I think will help see the oil, is have Krycek walk right, completely, into the lens and go to black.'

[Mulder: Feel better?   
Krycek: Like a new man.]

Rob Bowman:

I think the next day they saw the dailies and dug it. But it was one of those where it seems like, when I watch the shot, well, of course, that's the only way you could do it, when it was instead on the set standing there scratching my chin thinking, 'What am I gonna do to make the end of the episode not suck.'

##### Time Line November 1995 – Apocrypha CSM takes Krycek into custody while he is being occupied by the black oil. The entity is allowed to return to its UFO in an abandoned missile silo. Krycek is left alive but sealed in the silo.

[Krycek throwing up the oil.]

Kim Manners:

There was this huge silo and we had poor Nick Lea on top on his knees and we had this rubber face on him and these tubes and all this oil draining out of his face and I thought, 'well, I've arrived, I mean, it can't get any tougher than this.' But it did. (laughs)

Toby Lindala  
Special Effects Makeup

So he's got a strap on, a version of his own face on top of his own face, with all these tubes running in, the eyes were out of it, they were just kind of filling up with these walls of black oil ooze, and dripping down into this alien, kind of escaping.

Brett Dowler:

A couple of times the pressure would be too much and Krycek would go like this (bends forward), at the same time as the special effects guy pushing the plunger and the special effects guy would get a little bit nervous and the stuff would just come 'psshh' shooting out so fast that it was just like, everyone is laughing and going, 'this is not what Chris is gonna want.'

[Krycek banging on the silo door.]

Kim Manners:

And then we had the 10-13 on the door and that was my kind of first introduction to the little notes and secrets that Chris and Frank would build into the show.

##### Time Line November 26, 1996 – Tunguska Mulder and Krycek reach Tunguska and find a gulag. Mulder and several other involuntary experimental subjects are infected with the black oil.

[Krycek: What are we doing here, Mulder?   
Mulder: June 30th 1908, Tunguska tribesmen, Russian fur traders, look up into the southeastern Siberian sky and see a fireball streaking to Earth. When it hit the atmosphere it created a series of cataclysmic explosions that are considered to be the largest single cosmic event in the history of civilization. Two thousand times the force of the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.   
Krycek: What was it?   
Mulder: It's been speculated that it was a piece of a comet, or an asteroid, even a piece of anti-matter.]

Frank Spotnitz:

'Tunguska' and 'Terma' really came about by once again trying to find a big, fun canvas on which to tell stories. And so we wanted to do a gulag story and so that led to the idea of the Russians were experimenting separately with us on a vaccine for the black oil, so it was sort of an arms race.

John Shiban:

It just seemed natural that there would have been an alien-invasion/find-the-cure race between us and the Soviet Union.

Frank Spotnitz:

We got to have Mulder in a gulag, we got to have the men on horseback and him and Krycek breaking in, so there was a lot of sort of action-adventury stuff that we were really looking forward to doing.

Rob Bowman:

One of the big sets that we made it look like it was in Russia, was the prison. The exterior prison. It's basically a Rangers Station in the middle of Stanley Park, which is just a couple of trees away from downtown Vancouver. We brought in, I think, 50 or 60 truckloads of dirt. You just create the atmosphere of being far away, and you put a title under there, it says 'Tunguska, Russia'. We are more making sure you don't give them reasons to disbelieve it than to believe it. You got the Russians, you got the horses, you got the prison, you got all the stuff, what's in the shot that could spoil it – remove those things.

[Inside the gulag – Mulder and others strapped down.]

Kim Manners:

He'd read these things, but it never really got to David that this was not going to be the most comfortable acting moment of your career until he got there. And then once he realised what was going to be involved, it was kind of walking on thin ice, I think they call it, it was tough.

[Krycek's arm gets cut off.]

John Shiban:

In X-Files fashion, we just start applying the idea for that individual mythology episode to the mythology itself, and what pieces can we take, and who would be involved. And that's why Krycek is perfect for that. Oh, Krycek has a Russian name, well, is that by accident or is that a happy accident and to be honest it was a happy accident.

[Krycek: (in Russian) I am only here, Comrade, to congratulate you on a fine job.]

John Shiban:

I always loved Krycek. He swims with the waters and sometimes he swims against them, and you can never quite trust him but you kind of like him.

[Krycek and Mulder meeting for the first time.]

Lynne Carrow  
Casting

They really wanted to try to cast a local actor. We looked at a lot of actors from across Canada and there was an actor they really loved his look, Nicholas Lea.

Chris Carter:

No-one knew how important that character was going to be, so it really was a factor of Nick Lea's taking on the part, embodying the part and it being an interesting character in the end and a foil for Mulder and Scully and a person who was playing always both sides of the field.

Frank Spotnitz:

I don't think we ever intended for him to last as long as he lasted but we couldn't bear to part with him. So we kept finding ways to bring him back. And he really was the cat with nine lives because he should have died over and over again. He should have been blown up, he was infected with black oil, he had his arm cut off, but he kept coming back.

John Shiban:

You look back and you see how that character changed and grew and it's fascinating, and Nick did a wonderful job with it.

[Krycek shooting Mulder's father.]

John Shiban:

One of the pleasures, as a writer, of working on X-Files is we had quite a palette to work with and there were a lot of recurring characters who we were free to use as long as it didn't damage the ongoing story and the mythology.

[Mr X: You're a damn schoolboy, Mulder. You have no idea, no idea.   
Mulder: OK. Then tell me. Tell me!   
Mr X: I used to be you. I was where you are now. But you're not me, Mulder. I don't think you have the heart.]

Frank Spotnitz:

The storytelling function of the informant was critical to these mythology episodes. So the character X, played by Steven Williams was introduced. But there comes a point with a character like that where you feel like you've run your course, like that dynamic has, you've done as much with it as you can. And so, with great reluctance, we terminated X, and brought in a new informant. And very memorably he dies writing the initials of her job title in blood on the floor of Mulder's apartment building. He was replaced by Marita Covarubias and then eventually she too found her way out of the series.

[Marita: Mr Mulder. My name is Marita Covarubias. I'm the assistant to the Special Representative.]

Paul Rabwin:

With the supporting characters in the mythology, consistently played a great role in making the mythology cohesive.

Helga Ungurait:

It was neat with the Lone Gunmen because they were an important part of the story and they always helped Mulder and continue the plots along.

[Mulder and Scully in a bus.   
Mulder: These guys are like an extreme government watchdog group. They publish a magazine called 'The Lone Gunman'. Some of their information is first-rate, covert actions, classified weapons. Some of the ideas are downright spooky.   
Later, with the Lone Gunmen.   
Byers: Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Russian Social Democrats – he's been put into power by the most heinous and evil force of the 20th century.   
Mulder: Barney?   
Scully grins, Langly laughs.   
Byers: The CIA.   
Langly: Is this your sceptical partner?   
Frohike: She's hot.]

Tom Braidwood  
'Melvin Frohike'

You know, we've always looked at ourselves and sort of described ourselves as an information conduit. We were the ones that were living out on the edge and knew how to get ahold of certain pieces of information or knew where to find them or knew how to go about finding them in order to facilitate either Mulder's and Scully's needs in their searches.

Michael McKean  
'Morris Fletcher'

Those three were perfectly cast, and they were all very responsible, the three actors, Dean, Bruce and Tom, were very responsible about having an emotional life that fit their visual takes.

Tom Braidwood:

We were kind of a mouthpiece in the form of an explanation for the audience in terms of, well, if you didn't understand what was going on in the script at this point, here's what's happening. And then they'd go on to the rest of the show, you know, they'd get rid of us and go on to the rest of the show. We did that quite a bit. But on the whole we simply facilitated Mulder and Scully's needs. And brought, I guess, a certain sense of humour to the show which I think is something the fans kind of locked in on, they enjoyed that element of it.

[Byers: Good work sneaking out these charts.   
Frohike: Tucked them in my pants.   
Mulder: There's plenty of room down there.   
Langly: You look down, Mulder. Tell you what, you're welcome to come over Saturday night. We're all hopping on the internet to nitpick the scientific inaccuracies of Earth 2.   
Mulder: I'm doing my laundry.]

##### Time Line February 23, 1997 – Tempus Fugit Flight 549, carrying Max Fenig, crashes after an apparent encounter with a UFO. Mulder suspects that Max was abducted by aliens.

[On board the aircraft, as bright light shines through the windows and the aircraft is being shaken.]

David Gauthier:

We didn't want to go a full gimbal route, we wanted to really be able to create turbulence in its real form, and I know we've all been on certain flights that we don't want to remember, where we were clenching our teeth because the plane was doing all kinds of things we didn't think it was meant to do, so we thought of different ways and we ended up making a hydraulic unit that was essentially a teeter-totter and some sideways movement, but we did it rather rapidly and we were able to shake that thing, and we could have shaken it apart, and we had lots of power.

Kim Manners:

We shot the mid-air abduction, it took us four days. And we had handheld cameras in the cockpit, the operators had to have helmets on because the plane was so violently moving.

Helga Unguriat:

It was shaking so bad we couldn't keep focus on the monitor. "Cut! Cut! Cut! OK, I've got to get off this thing!" So we had to get off the plane to at least be able to look at the monitors without having it shake so much. And the camera guys were amazing because when they're handheld they're trying to hold on, meanwhile the plane's shaking and the actors are moving, and the focus pullers are going, "Oh, jeez, here we go." But it looked amazing.

David Gauthier:

Within two hours I had made 12 people violently ill, we had to exchange at least a dozen extras.

[Max is pulled out of the aircraft.]

Brett Dowler:

The biggest thing there, was the physical effect of pulling somebody out of the window. That was really quite tricky because getting the exact angle to make sure that when you yank this person out they're not going to be banging up against anything else, or the seat, as they were getting pulled out of their chair. So that was really carefully designed and I thought David Gauthier and Graham Murray, the way they worked together on coordinating that was brilliant.

Kim Manners:

I think that's one sequence that I'm proudest of. All the X-Files that I've directed, that sequence just worked out beautifully.

Rob Bowman:

Research on a crash site was difficult because it's so catastrophic what occurs and we met with an NTSB guy and he gave us all the details and Graham wanted it to feel like we had just accidentally photographed a crash site, he didn't want it to look like a movie set at all.

Shirley Inget  
Set Decorator

I remember the tail section we found somewhere in South Carolina and we had to ship it in.

Rob Bowman:

There was luggage and dolls and clothes everywhere, I mean, it's an explosion. And for it not to be in the trees or everywhere would have been untrue. And it was also painting and burning this old abandoned field black. I remember being in the chopper flying over, shooting it, and we started back a couple of miles and came up on it, it looked like news footage.

Brett Dowler:

Probably one of my biggest single sets. Between construction, paint, greens, and set dec, we probably created a 30 to 40 acres set.

Shirley Inget:

There was an Air Canada pilot who came by to look because he had flown the Vancouver to Los Angeles route and he had flown over the top of it and he couldn't believe what he saw and he thought, "When did this happen and why don't I know about it?" So he came down that night to investigate, just to see what was up, so it was fun talking to him. He said it looked like a real plane crash.

Row Bowman:

That episode, having that aside, was the biggest episode I'd directed to date and again we're at an airport, we're under water, we've got tanks, and hangars with the rebuilt plane, and it was so fun at that time because we were just making movies that were running on television. You know, we had Mulder and Scully driving underneath a DC6. It took two nights, out at Abbotsfield airport – it was a record, I know this – we had 13 generators, 75 4K power lights that raked the runway, 4 Condors, 2 [...], we lit up 35 hundred feet of runway at night, and really had a DC6 come in and land. I mean, it was the most generators ever used on anything in Vancouver history, and we were making a TV show.

[Garrett: Look out your window, Agent Mulder. You see the lights? Now, imagine if one of those lights flickered off. You'd hardly notice, would you?]

John Shiban:

I like to try to put in, and we all do, little homages to things that inspired us. There's one in 'Max', I believe the character's name was Garrett who was sort of the bad guy that Mulder encounters on the airplane. I was asked to write a speech for him early on in the process and I just remembered 'The Third Man', and I remembered that great speech that Orson Welles has that Graham Greene wrote, or some say Orson Welles wrote it, where he's up in the Ferris wheel and he says, "Look at those dots down there, the people, but look at those dots and would you really cry if one or two of those dots just stop moving?" You know, it's a whole justification for the immorality of what he's doing. And it just hit me, oh, here's my chance to finally do that scene.

[Garrett: Is it worth sacrificing the future, the lives of millions, to keep a few lights on?]

John Shiban:

I was pleased to get that little nod to one of my personal inspirations.

##### Time Line October 1997 – Gethsemane Scully reports to a committee that Mulder was found dead in his apartment of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

[Detective: Thanks for coming down to do this.   
He lifts up the sheet covering the body.   
Detective: It him?]

Frank Spotnitz:

'Gethsemane' to me was a very important episode, not just because it had probably the best cliff-hanger of all, which was Mulder's apparent suicide, which incidentally we really tried to torture the audience because normally we would say 'To be continued' and we didn't do that, there was no 'To be continued', you just had to wonder, was it the end of the show? And some people at the network and studio were very concerned about that, that we were going to lose viewers who would think the show was over because Mulder had killed himself.

[In a briefing room, Scully reports that Mulder died from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.]

John Shiban:

I think the moment itself is great, particularly because it's on Scully's face when we learn the news and she's hearing it with the FBI. And nobody can sell a moment like that better than Gillian. Even if in the back of your mind you're saying, 'no, you can't do that', you can't help but a little tear come to your eye.

Frank Spotnitz:

What I especially loved about that episode, aside from the production value of shooting in a frozen set for the cave where they were digging out this supposed alien corpse, was this idea about religion, because what became increasingly clear to Chris and me, in years of working on these mythology episodes, was that Mulder's quest for extra-terrestrial life was akin to trying to prove God existed. And there's this wonderful scene in that episode with him and Scully on the stairs, where he says, "Come on, if you could prove God exists, wouldn't you?" And she says, "No, I take it on faith." Which is so profound and correct, that is what religion is about, you must take it on faith, God is not going to prove it to you.

[Mulder: If someone could provide to you the existence of God, would it change you?   
Scully: Only if it had been disproven.   
Mulder: Then you accept the possibility that belief in God is a lie?   
Scully: I don't think about it actually, and I don't think that it can be proven.   
Mulder: But what if it could be? Wouldn't that knowledge be worth seeking? Or is it just easier to go on believing the lie.   
Scully: I can't go with you, Mulder.]

Frank Spotnitz:

It's times like that when the mythology became exciting.

##### Time Line October 1997 – Redux Mulder is not dead. In fact, Scully is cooperating with him to entrap the Conspiracy source in the FBI.

[Mulder bursts into the apartment above him. The man who has been spying on him is trying to burn some documents.]

John Shiban:

I think the complexity of the following year, when we came back and did the two-parter, Redux I and II worked and what I think justified or allowed us to get away with that was that Scully was in on it, we didn't cheat Scully and so by not cheating Scully ultimately I think the audience forgives you for that because you get to see what happened, you get to see why she'd do what she did, why Mulder did what he did. I don't think it was a cheap shot is what I'm saying, I think it was a really sound thing to do and it made for a great moment.

Frank Spotnitz:

Redux and Redux II were very successful I think, especially Redux II, which has this lovely threesome of ideas. You know, is this medical treatment, is it religious faith, or is it the chip that the Cigarette Smoking Man produces, that ultimately leads to the remission of Scully's cancer. You don't know and I loved the competition that those three ideas had in that story.

Chris Carter:

It sort of takes the idea of the show and it just spins it in the most interesting way.

John Shiban:

We would always plot stories with one or two or three options for the audience to chew on.

[Mulder: Scully's cancer's gone into remission.]

John Shiban:

You never show the audience something was definitive in a situation like that which not only kept the mystery going, which ironically is how the real world is, you read the newspaper and it's subject to interpretation.

Frank Spotnitz:

That's also the episode that leads to Mulder's loss of faith for the entire season, which is something that, even though we kept playing it again and again in the mythology episodes, people could not accept that Mulder had really lost his faith in aliens, that the Smoking Man had shaken him, that's what we'd done in those two episodes with some success. That was probably the last season where we could simply do chapters with starting to attack the heart of what the mythology was about.

##### Time Line May 2001 – Vienen Mulder and Doggett are reluctantly thrown together to investigate several deaths aboard an oil rig and Mulder becomes convinced that the rig is really carrying the black oil alien.

[On the oil rig, the foreman's eyes begin to glow. A bright light begins to engulf him, while a worker lies on the floor, terrified.   
In the basement office.   
Mulder: These files include the same kind of radiation phenomena. Tissue destroyed by exposure –  
Doggett: Black oil. Five years ago, you and Agent Scully investigated a case of a World War II plane salvaged from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean where a substance was brought to the surface which you described as a highly contagious virus of extra-terrestrial origin that has radioactive properties and can take over a man's body. And as part of an alien conspiracy to colonise the planet, if I'm not mistaken.   
Mulder: And you'd love to help but you left your light sabre at home. How'd you get stuck down here, Agent Doggett? Kersh catch you peeing in his cornflakes?]

John Shiban:

What's great from a visual standpoint, with the black oil, it's a great effect, it's not that difficult to do and it allowed us to play the sort of classic body-snatcher's question mark of who do I trust. Have you been taken over or not, because you can't tell except in opportune moments when your eyes go black with this stuff in you. And then when it's done with you, you get a great scene were someone has to spit it out of all their orifices, which is always nice.

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[Samantha: The men you've been seeking are the progeny of two original visitors - clones who have been attempting to establish a colony here since the late 1940s.   
Mulder: A colony?   
Samantha: Loosely. The community by necessity is dispersed. There are clones identical to my parents living in virtually every part of the country.   
Mulder: What are they trying to accomplish?   
Samantha: It's their belief that our stewardship of the planet is being forsaken. That by default they'll someday become the natural heirs.]

[Men running in the hangar. Artifact flying through the air and burying itself in a bible. A spaceship over the burning city. A gray alien. Mulder floating up into a spaceship. The chess game. Skinner affected by nanobots. A man pulling the skin off his face. Small alien figures. Scully in the hospital bed. A line of fire across the ground. Mulder looking up into the bright light from the spaceship. CSM shooting Spender. Scully standing by the spaceship on the beach. Mulder kissing Diana Fowley. The syndicate gathered in the hangar. Mulder falling from the cliff top.]