

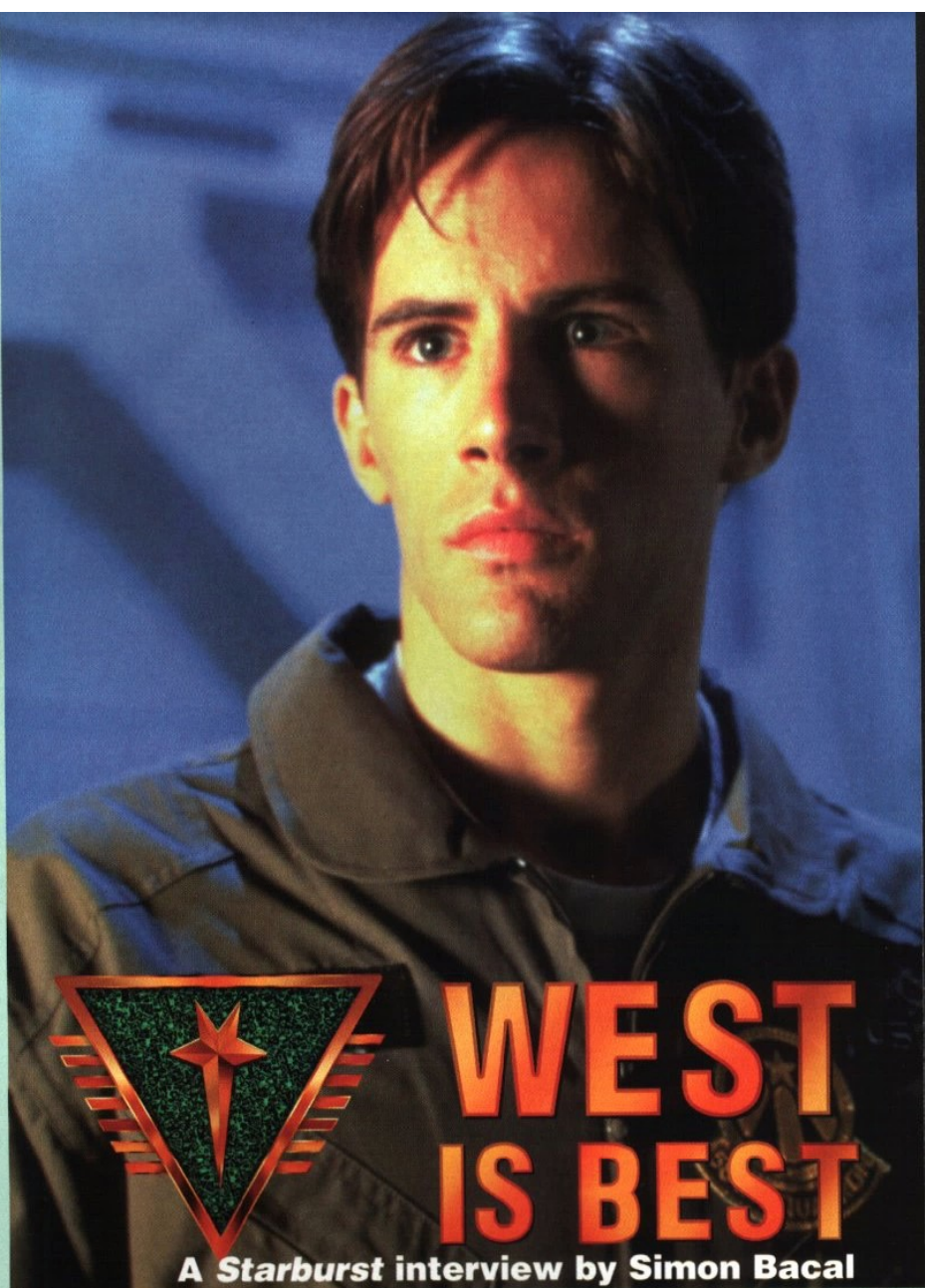
“Space: Above and Beyond reached out to me because the ongoing action and drama always unfolds within the confines of a dark, gritty, dangerous and, of course, deadly environment,” says actor Morgan Weisser, who plays cool-headed cadet Nathan West.

SPACE, of course, is the multi-million dollar brainchild of Glen Morgan and James Wong, who previously served as executive producers of *The X-Files*. Weisser is quick to draw comparisons between the two shows. “Like *The X-Files*, we’re dealing with a lot of unknown, dark and clandestine elements,” he says. “We’re always wondering whether the government is connected to the aliens and we want to know what secrets they’re keeping from us — the grunts on the front line. Obviously that’s a massive departure from those Sci-Fi shows which portray the world as an incredibly harmonious, sterile and squeaky clean environment.”

Dark Horizon

Set in 2063, *Space* unfolds against the gritty backdrop of the US Saratoga — an intergalactic battleship which becomes home for a close knit group of space marines called the 58th Squadron. Thrust into the throes of a massive intergalactic war which threatens Earth’s very survival, the 58th comprises West, Shane Vansen (Kristen Cloke), Vanessa Damphouse (Lanei Chapman), Paul Wang (Joel de la Fuente), and Cooper Hawkes (Rodney Rowland) — an In Vitro, a member of a race of humanoids hatched from test tubes. Commanding them is McQueen (James Morrison).

“The show’s darker side didn’t come across too much in the two hour pilot because its glossy look was a showcase for the special effects,” says Weisser, who previously appeared on TV screens in *Extreme Close-up*, *Long Road Home*, *Stay the Night*, *Crime and Punishment*, *China Beach* and *Law and Order* and such feature films as *Mother*, *Shortcut to*



WEST IS BEST

A Starburst interview by Simon Bacal



A close knit group of space marines



Before Weisser and his fellow cast members began their tour of interstellar military service, they rabidly sought crucial inspiration from books on historical wars

Paradise and Prayer of the Rollerboys.

"But, it's certainly present in the ensuing episodes — something which, I think, surprised the people at Fox. Initially, they didn't realise that the show would be so dark and gritty, but, because Glen and Jim were shooting for a sombre ambiance since the very beginning, they just went with that approach.

"When the show starts off, the world is shown as this peaceful place which has dealt with most of its problems," Weisser adds. "But once we're thrown into this massive war, we get the sense that the world, where everything is not so hunky dorey, is actually coming apart at the big seams."

Star Search

In the feature-length pilot West, part of a colonial program out to conquer a distant planet, is due to leave earth with his girlfriend, Kylene, but the futuristic lovebirds are separated after West's place in the program is offered to an In Vitro. When Kylene is forced to leave with the colony, West realises that a life in the marine corps is the only key to a reunion with his flame.

"Although my personal history is obviously very different from Nathan West's background, I'm trying to enhance the character with my own personality and basic sensibilities when it comes to loyalty, practicality and morality. Like me, West possesses a very definite and clear sense of right and wrong. He knows that his forced separation from Kylene is flat out wrong, so, in turn, he holds a grudge against In Vitros. When he gets angry he'll call Hawkes a 'tank', a racist slur which is basically equivalent to someone calling a black person a 'nigger', but when they're out there on the battlefield, they back each other up to the max. Basically, the bond between himself and the other people in the 58th Squadron is really cemented, so, even though he went AWOL in one episode, he now realises that you just don't leave your buddies in a position where they can get hurt."

Hooking onto the Internet, Weisser discovered that fans have taken an immediate liking to the show, but also learned that West's ongoing determination to find Kylene could become overplayed.

"From what I've read online, I know that it's definitely becoming a little bit old for the audience. It's okay if we touch upon the quest once in a while, but I don't want the character to be walking around with a frown on his face, whipping out her picture and pining after her week after week after week. At the same



"The grunts on the front line"



The main cast of the series



"Although my personal history is obviously very different from Nathan West's background, I'm trying to enhance the character with my own personality"

time, like those parents who lose a son in battle and who want his body back so that they can bid farewell to him, this guy would, at some point, like to know her fate once and for all."

In *Eyes*, an episode which aired just one day after the shocking and harrowing assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, United Earth's leader falls victim to an assassin's bullet — just as the *Saratoga's* crew is gearing up for shore leave. The tragic development causes Earth's committee to hold an emergency meeting to aboard the *Saratoga* to elect a new leader, but the assassin is also aboard.

Other intergalactic high flying adventure involving the 58th include *A Good Day to Die*, in which the *Saratoga* disables and commandeers an alien vessel in the hope of using it against the aliens

themselves; *The Enemy* — a tale about an alien weapon which taps into the marines' greatest fears when they land on a planet's surface in search of a missing squadron and *To Die For* — in which the 58th are captured and interrogated by Alien Artificial beings.

Research

Before Weisser and his fellow cast members began their tour of interstellar military service, they rabidly sought crucial inspiration from books on historical wars, journals on standard military protocol and a real-life combat hardened US marine.

"While we were preparing to shoot the pilot in Australia, this insane guy, who put us through push ups and made us stand to attention to the point where one of us nearly passed out, constantly tried

to psychologically mess with our heads — something which happens in boot camp," Weisser recalls. "At one point, he even warned us that he would track us all down and kill us one by one if we didn't portray the marine corps in a positive light. Well, you know what? We all believed him one hundred and ten per cent. It was pretty scary because this guy also talked about being stationed in Third World countries and described those moments when he was shot at during security detail for heads of state and government officials. The look of glee and joy which shone in his eyes when he described how it felt to be shot at or to see someone shot was totally alien to myself and the other members of the cast — but we were sure glad that this guy was on our side."

