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By IAN SPELLING

SPACE: ABOVE & BEYOND

Glen Morgan & James Wong are sending Earth's youngest pilots into intergalactic war.



"They're all very talented actors and very good people," says Morgan of his cast of relative newcomers.

While *X* once marked the spot for the writing/producing duo of Glen Morgan and James Wong, they've now moved above and beyond *The X-Files* to create, write and executive produce the new SF television entry *Space: Above & Beyond*. So busy are Morgan and Wong with the show that a three-hour window of interview opportunity comes and goes, and it's not for another two hours that Morgan can finally sneak away from the set to introduce SF fans to *Space*.

"The show, which takes place in 2063, is centered around Nathan West [Morgan Weisser], who has always wanted to go to a space colony with his girl friend. On the eve of the launch, he's removed from the ship because of affirmative action taken on behalf of the In Vitros, people raised in gestation tanks by the government to become soldiers,"

explains Morgan. "Nathan is removed from the ship heading to a colony and the love of his life goes off into space *without* him.

"Meanwhile, we intercut with our two other leads: Cooper Hawkes [Rodney Rowland], an In Vitro who's unjustly jailed and sentenced to the Marine Corps, and Shane Vansen [Kristen Cloke], whose parents were killed by artificial intelligence creatures known as Silicates. They basically assassinated her parents right in front of her and her sisters. Shane has been raised by her sisters and now she wants to do something for *her*. She joins the Marine Corps and gives her life, in her own way, back to her parents. Meanwhile, Nathan also joins the Marine Corps. He thinks that since the military has a presence in space, that's his best chance to get back to his love, because the Marine Corps may be searching for the colonists.

Before anything like that can happen, the colonies—and the country's finest fighter pilots—are attacked by an alien race and massacred, and the world's sent into an intergalactic war."

Cadet Casts

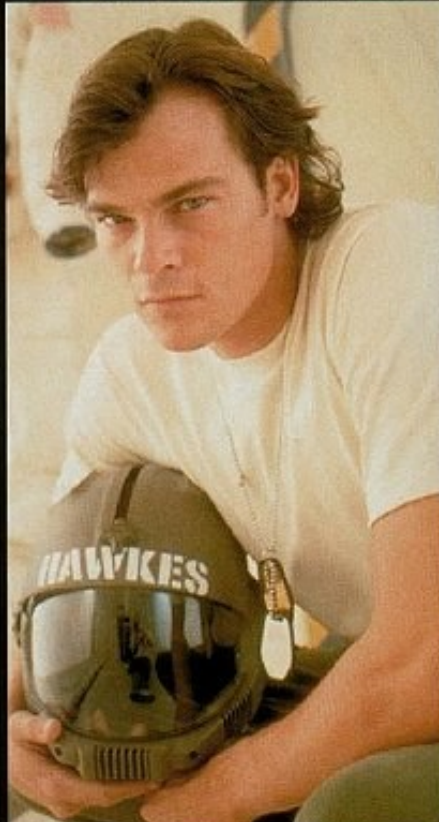
When casting *Space*, Morgan and Wong took a unique approach, one that has worked to perfection on *The X-Files*. They went with talented, but relatively unknown, actors rather than big-name stars. About the closest thing to a marquee name in *Space* is R. Lee Ermey, best known for portraying military

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figures in such films as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Body Snatchers*. He plays the tough-as-nails cadet trainer Sergeant Major Frank Bougus in the pilot and will be a recurring character. Weisser's credits include several telemovies and series guest shots, as well as the 1991 low-budget feature *Prayer of the Rollerboys*. Cloke was a regular on the short-lived *Winnetka Road*, played a recurring character on the series *Silk Stalkings* and guest-starred on *Quantum Leap*. Rowland counted among his pre-*Space* credits numerous New York stage assignments, as well as such TV movies as *If Somebody Only Knew* and the yet-to-air cable film *Block Party*.

"They're all very talented actors and very good people," says Morgan of his cast. "David Duchovny was sort of familiar when we did *X-Files*, but Gillian Anderson was an unknown. There was great excitement in watching them develop. That's much more interesting than casting stars. The actors on our show are hungry. We didn't want baggage from another series or maybe a movie that a particular actor had been associated with carrying over. We wanted to have the audience learn about them right from the start. We've got an attractive cast, but we're trying to avoid being labeled *Space, 90210*."

"Kristen Cloke, who plays Shane, is a dark figure. She's pretty, but not overtly beautiful. She had a toughness to her—when she auditioned, it was clear that she had a dark past that she was really sad about. Rodney Rowland, who plays the In Vitro, or Tank, started out as a print model, which was stunning to me because when he was auditioning and I saw his ads, I went, 'This is not the right guy.' Then, I realized he's very new, very raw, and *that's* what's exciting. He's



Rodney Rowland is Cooper Hawkes, an In Vitro, "people raised in gestation tanks by the government to become soldiers," according to *Space* producer/writer Glen Morgan.



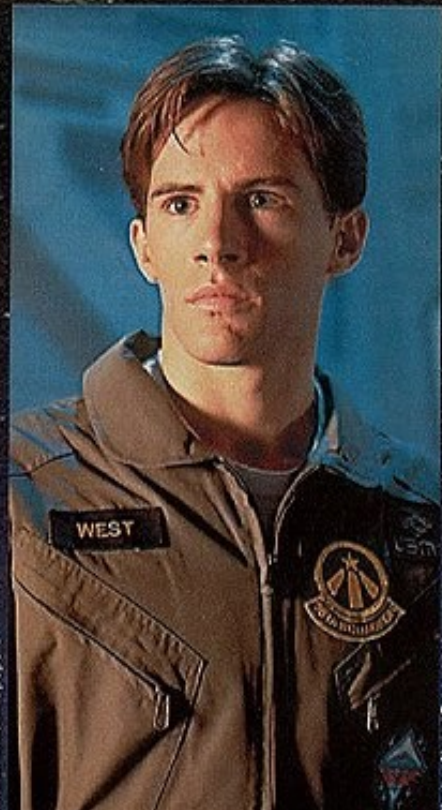
Artificial intelligence creatures known as Silicates killed her parents, and now Shane Vanssen (Kristen Cloke) is on the firing line herself.

sometimes very different from take to take. Because the Cooper character is someone who comes to life at age 18 and doesn't understand emotions, Rodney is perfect

because, in his learning to act better, it translates into that character trying to learn about life. Morgan Weisser was just the best actor we auditioned, and we wanted that chiseled-



Top Gun in space? Sure, but don't look at the pretty young leads and call it *Space, 90210*.



Separated from his girl friend before they could embark on a new life together, Nathan West (Morgan Weisser) goes AWOL in an early episode.



"They're going to be friendly and they'll be comrades, but they'll also fight amongst each other," reveals Morgan of the plans for the regulars like Lanel Chapman's Vanessa Damphousse.



If you don't recognize Joel de la Fuente, don't worry. "We didn't want baggage from another series or maybe a movie that a particular actor had been in carrying over," Morgan explains.

jaw, stud guy look for Nathan. I think he's handsome, but he also has a very big heart and can play more of the romantic lead. He's really a wonderful actor."

Mission Scenarios

It's Morgan's belief that the series pilot, in which the lead characters, all cadets called into action as fighter aviators after the Marine Corps' most talented pilots are massacred by the aliens, will intrigue viewers and compel them to tune in to subsequent episodes. He feels people will want to learn more about the protagonists, about the mysterious aliens and about the In Vitros. The first post-pilot episode, "The Farthest Man from Home," deals with Nathan going AWOL because he's near the planet that was to be colonized by his girl friend and the others on her mission, and he has heard rumors that people on the planet are still alive.

Morgan won't tip his hand when it comes to revealing more about the aliens. Like an onion, he suggests, they'll be unveiled a layer at a time. "Everyone wants to know about the aliens, but we don't really want to say too much. They're from a particular planet and they don't breathe air. It would just lose the mystery if we told too much, so we're revealing things about them bit by bit. We're trying to equate it to the American soldiers and the war in the Pacific," he notes. "At that time, the Japanese were totally an alien culture. You would come across their camps and find chopsticks and see their swords and see writing. There wasn't really that much face-

to-face interaction, but you came to learn a lot about them. That's what we want to do on *Space* with our aliens. In the first episode, Nathan comes across some graves that he believes the colonists left. When he starts digging, he sees a skeleton with fused fingers. So, there are similarities between the aliens and us.

"In the second episode, 'The Dark Side of the Sun,' we're exploring how Shane has to come face-to-face with the Silicate guerrillas. These are beings responsible for her family's death and she just wants revenge. The story is about the futility of revenge. We're trying, as we go along, to deal with what war is about. We're looking at how our guys, as soldiers, see the war. They're not really involved in the big happenings or decisions, but they get their orders and go about obeying them."

"I'm not sure how embraced *Space* will be by SF fans."

Relationships between the characters will evolve as episodes air. Though Morgan and Wong have ideas as to what will happen amongst the main characters and such regulars as Vanessa Damphousse (Lanel Chapman), Paul Wang (Joel de la Fuente), cadet commander McQueen (James Morrison) and the hard-ass Sergeant Major Bougus, future outings will be predicated on the chemistry of the actors, the response from fans and the

interaction of the characters. "Sometimes people develop chemistry on screen that you never anticipated. We definitely *don't* want our characters all falling in love with each other. They're going to be friendly and they'll be comrades, but they'll also fight amongst each other," promises Morgan. "We're not going to have big love triangles, but otherwise we're just going to see how it all works out.

"We're really trying to find the tone of John Ford Westerns. *Space* is really about the Depression and an oncoming war. I think we can have this futuristic setting and be dealing with questions of what leadership and faith are. On a real level, you get young people who find a voice, like a Kurt Cobain, and then he shoots himself. Those are the things we're trying to deal with thematically that we hope today's audience will relate to. I feel, initially, that you can hate the aliens because you don't know them, they leave horror in their path with how they torture the colonists, but one of the pieces that we're drawing from is *All Quiet on the Western Front*, both the book and the movie. You learn that your enemy is indeed a life form, too, and not just the horrible, one-legged, horned monster you've been led to believe it is."

Though *Space* will occasionally deal with topical issues like affirmative action, the executive producer expects that his show will not be *Star Trek*-like and attempt to address a great many modern-day issues in futuristic stories. "I don't think it will go that way. I hope we'll be a bit more visceral and emo-



"We're very focused on the characters and what the situation is doing to them," notes Morgan.

tional about it. *Star Trek* sometimes approaches issues from a very intellectual point-of-view," Morgan says. "We're just not that smart."

Still, Morgan promises that *Space* will differ from the many other SF shows currently filling the airwaves. "Jim and I see this not so much as an SF piece as kind of a WW II movie or a war piece in space. We're drawing, as I said, from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, but also from *Twelve O'Clock High*, *Guadalcanal Diary* and *Air Force*. So, our look is much darker than you'll see on some other shows. Our people sweat and bleed and their hair is messed up. The vehicles they fly in are very cramped and, just like an aircraft, hot and sweaty. We'll probably be much more action-oriented than some shows, but we don't want to do action just for action's sake. It should tell you something about the characters as it happens. We have a great deal of respect for all of the other shows out there and we've watched them and said, 'Well, this is what they do; let's not rip them off or copy them. How can we be different?' That was what dictated our choices."

In the Ford classics and many other war films, the good guys often went down fighting for the causes in which they believed. Even John Wayne died in *Fighting Seabees* and *Sands of Iwo Jima*. Might Morgan and Wong risk potential negative fan reaction and kill off a character or two early on in the show's run? "That's what we want to do," says Morgan without elaboration. What, no hints? "No hints at all," he responds, laughing. "Our actors read STARLOG, you know."

Combat Objectives

Taking a few steps back in the creative process, Morgan goes into detail about how

Space evolved. By television standards, it was a fairly quick ascension from concept to air. Lucie Salhany, who was the president of Fox Television about two years ago and had been instrumental in launching Paramount's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* into syndication in 1987, expressed interest in having a show developed with a theme along the lines of a *Star Trek* academy scenario. Picture the *Next Generation* outing "Lower Decks" as the concept for an entire series. On behalf of Salhany, Fox executive Peter Roth approached Morgan and Wong, who were concerned that such a show might alienate Trekkers. Still, Morgan and Wong had stood on the outside looking in once too often and eventually pounced on the opportunity.

"We're really trying to find the tone of John Ford Westerns."

"Jim and I had done a lot of pilots, but were always kind of knocking on the door. Unless you're a Steven Bochco or Witt-Thomas, it's hard to get in. So, we said, 'OK, they want to do a show in space. How do we make it our own?' Jim and I had grown up on the NASA space program. *Apollo 13* might have changed things around a bit recently, but pride in the nation's space program was a forgotten feeling not long ago. When I went to school as a kid," remembers Morgan, "we learned about space exploration and these great ideas about our country's successes. But when we went home, the country was being torn apart by race riots and the Vietnam War. The only thing we had to look up to as kids was the American space program.

"We wanted to recapture some of that feeling, which led us to develop the show as we have. Jim and I had taken a 'Fiction of War' class in college and read books like *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Catch-22*. There were themes in those books that were fascinating to us—people are put in a cauldron, and when you do that to people, they do things they wouldn't normally do. So, that's how we merged the space and the military elements together. It's kind of a long-winded explanation of why we chose space as our setting, but it's the truth."

Morgan, who adds that other influences on *Space* included everything from *ALIENS* to the seminal SF works of Robert Heinlein (which Wong read as a kid) and Joe Halldeman's *The Forever War*, reports that he and Wong have an ideal working relationship and that they balance each other well. Morgan and Wong have written four of the first six episodes, but he notes that co-executive producer Stephen Zito and supervising producer Tom Towler also play an active role in bringing *Space* to life. Asked to delineate how he and Wong divide their present work load, Morgan laughs, then explains that "Jim is a really good film editor and I think I'm better at casting. We definitely write together. So, it just comes down to, 'You do this, and I'll do that.' If I get along better than Jim with a particular director, I'll go sit on the set. We just play things by ear as they come up."

The show's special FX are being handled by an outfit in Pasadena, California called Area 51, operated by Tim McHugh, who serves as *Space*'s visual FX producer. Glenn Campbell works with McHugh and has the title of visual FX supervisor. "I can't say enough about these guys," enthuses Morgan. "Everybody that saw the pilot script said,

'Forget about it. This will require feature film-quality FX.' Tim came in, and you could tell he was concerned, but he was positive and said he would give it a try. We had all talked about it and said we wanted a World War II look. From what I've read, I know that George Lucas referenced World War II fighter footage while working on *Star Wars*. So, we wanted the viewer to be in the fighters with our pilots and not have so many 'God shots' all the time. Tim and Glenn are great. Their shot composition is great, and so is the way things come in and out of the frame. Even the lighting is great."

Battle Records

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out that leaving *The X-Files* to create *Space* was a huge gamble for Morgan and Wong. After all, during their year-and-a-half with *The X-Files*, the show catapulted from cult favorite to mainstream hit, with the duo's episodes among the most eagerly anticipated. "We really liked everybody over there. They're good friends," states Morgan. "I really like David and Gillian. They were a pleasure to write for. It was becoming a big hit show when we made the decision to leave. You work on a lot of crap waiting for that chance to have a hit. But we were hungry and wanted to do our own show."



Will the rest of the *Space* characters be comfortable fighting alongside Cooper Hawkes, who has been unjustly jailed and sentenced to the Marine Corps?

Writing and producing *The X-Files*, notes Morgan, both did and didn't help him and his partner prepare for the rigors of creating and running a show on their own. "*Space* is a bigger show," he says with a laugh. "They're both very hard. Part of it was a matter of learning more about FX. We knew we had to be ahead of schedule on scripts. But the most

Having made a reputation investigating what lurks in the dark on *The X-Files*, Wong and Morgan now turn their attention to the endless black void of space.



important thing we learned from our experience on *The X-Files* was how we can tell stories across a 22-episode season, how a character like the *X-Files*' 'Cancer Man' can play out, how you can have mysteries and not address everything. You can emotionally tie up a character without necessarily tying up the whole plot, or vice versa. We learned how each episode can have closure, yet emotionally lead the viewer into the next show. When you start to see the episodes of *Space*, which are even better than the pilot, which got caught between regimes at Fox, you'll actually see more similarities between *X-Files* and *Space*."

Though Morgan clearly seems to look back upon *The X-Files* with fondness as an important learning lesson and giant step in his career, it's his feeling that the show is now completely behind him (Morgan and Wong discussed the series in STARLOG #210). He watched an episode written by his brother Darin ("Humbug") late last season, but otherwise has been too busy with *Space* to devote much attention to his former project. Asked if he expects to be involved in any way with the proposed *X-Files* film, Morgan simply says no, then in a virtually emotionless tone adds, "I doubt [X-Files creator and executive producer] Chris Carter would want us involved and, to be honest, I would be surprised if the film happened."

Speaking of film, Morgan and Wong scripted the little-seen 1985 big-screen drama *The Boys Next Door*, which starred Charlie Sheen, Christopher McDonald, Maxwell Caulfield and Patti D'Arbanville and was directed by Penelope Spheeris. Though Morgan admits that he would much rather go to the movies than sit in front of a TV set, he doesn't find the small screen medium stifling. "*Space*, *The X-Files*, even *21 Jump Street*, which I worked on several years ago, always felt like we were doing a different film every week. If we get past 12 episodes on *Space*,

we can try things, experiment with structure, with characters, editing and FX. TV is much more immediate than film," he asserts. "You see your work right away and get feedback right away, and I'm enjoying working in television."

If *Space: Above & Beyond* should catch on with viewers and attract a sizable audience, the possibility exists that the program could be on the air for five or six years. It's a scenario that scares Morgan, who, in a perfect world, doesn't envision being *Space*-bound for more than three years. "That's how long we're contracted to do it. Right now, I like everybody here and we have everywhere to take our characters," he comments. "Jim and I like coming up with a concept for a show, casting people and giving birth, so to speak, to a show. But, we have our eye on films and we'll get there eventually."

As the conversation comes to an end and Morgan prepares to return to the set, he explains that, while he believes *Space* is a quality production with much to offer, there's the possibility that fans won't take to it. It's not so much a matter of Morgan assuming a pessimistic stance, but rather, one that's cautious and practical. "This is probably my own insecurity, but I'm not sure how embraced *Space* will be by SF fans. From what I found from *The X-Files* and from watching *Star Trek* reactions from the sidelines, you never know how fans will react. You should be able to have a broad horizon when working in SF, but sometimes fans say, 'You have to have this,' or, 'You should be scientifically correct,' or, 'You have to have these gizmos.' In order to not be like other SF shows, we haven't done much of that," concludes Glen Morgan. "We're very focused on the characters and what the situation is doing to them. So, being honest, I'm very nervous about *Space*, but very excited about it, too. It would be a great honor to have fans embrace it, and I hope they will."

